Against Rousseau

"ON THE STATE OF NATURE" AND "ON THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE"

Joseph de Maistre

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY RICHARD A. LEBRUN

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JOSEPH DE MAISTRE

Translated and edited by
RICHARD A. LEBRUN

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Preface

I want first to acknowledge the fine scholarship of my fellow "maistrian," Professor Jean-Louis Darcel of the Université de Savoie in Chambéry. His excellent critical editions of Joseph de Maistre's "anti-Rousseau" essays inspired me to attempt English-language versions. I am most pleased to acknowledge the assistance of Dr William R. Everdell of Saint Ann's School in Brooklyn Heights, New York, who read the first draft of the entire manuscript and offered many corrections, suggestions, and translations. Those who read later versions, and provided additional corrections and suggestions, include Dr Owen Bradley of the University of Tennessee (Knoxville), Dr Graeme Garrard of the University of Wales (Cardiff), and Dr George D. Knysh, my colleague at St Paul's College, University of Manitoba. I would also like to thank Dr Edmund G. Berry, Professor Emeritus of the Department of Classics, University of Manitoba, for providing translations of a number of Latin citations and for identifying difficult references. I am grateful as well to Dr Henry Hardy of Wolfson College, Oxford University, and to Dr Rory Egan of the University of Manitoba, for identifying some particularly elusive Latin citations. Where published translations have been used, these have been acknowledged in the notes. The remaining errors and infelicities are, of course, my own responsibility.

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Introduction

Why, it might be asked, should anyone be interested in Joseph de Maistre's critique of Jean-Jacques Rousseau? After all, Maistre never completed the two essays in which he undertook his most detailed criticisms of Rousseau, and the pieces remained unpublished until 1870, almost fifty years after Maistre's death in 1821. Although written in 1794 and 1795, at the very time Rousseau enjoyed an exaggerated reputation as a progenitor of the French Revolution and its theoretical basis in popular sovereignty, Maistre's manuscripts obviously had no influence on the contemporary course of events. And while Maistre's critique is not lacking in force and interest, it must be admitted that Rousseau scholars have never paid much attention to Maistre's criticisms or acknowledged them to be particularly original or definitive. Nevertheless, Maistre's critique of Rousseau is of interest for a number of reasons.

In the first place, Maistre's critique illustrates a significant contemporary view of Rousseau, a perspective that saw Rousseau in and through the French Revolution. In so far as many of the revolutionaries, particularly Jacobins like Robespierre, acknowledged and indeed acclaimed Rousseau's theory of popular sovereignty as justifying what they were doing, it is interesting to see how a well-informed and intelligent contemporary opponent of the Revolution and its ideology attempted to refute these theories.

Second, the manuscripts in which Maistre worked out his criticisms of Rousseau's views on the state of nature and the sovereignty of the people are significant evidence for Maistre's own intellectual evolution. In these two documents, we see Maistre moving from a basically political interpretation of the origins, nature, and significance of the French Revolution towards the essentially providential interpretation that will characterize his major works. The anti-Rousseau pieces reflect his pre-revolutionary background, interests, and assumptions, his

experience of the Revolution, and the direction in which own thought was moving.

Third, there is a growing appreciation of Maistre's importance as a surprisingly modern figure who foreshadowed significant currents of twentieth-century thought and culture.[1] Although these anti-Rousseau pieces may be among the least modern of Maistre's writings, and although incomplete and lacking the characteristic polish of his other work, they contain some of his more remarkable insights on the human condition and social and political organization. The essays are thus relevant to any reconsideration of Maistre's thought.

Fourth, read carefully in the context of his later writings, these essays also reveal some surprising ambiguities in Maistre's relationship to Rousseau, who was himself one of the most ambiguous figures in Western intellectual history. Though perceived and attacked by Maistre as an archtypical philosophe, Rousseau has more recently been interpreted as an important precursor of the Counter-Enlightenment Maistre embodied.[2] Since these pieces contain Maistre's most comprehensive treatment of Rousseau's ideas, they are of obvious importance for assessment of a challenging interpretive problem.

At the time Maistre wrote these essays he was living in Lausanne, where he had settled after fleeing his native Chambéry when it had been invaded by a French revolutionary army in September 1792. Abandoning his home, his property, and his profession as a magistrate, he had begun a new career as a counter-revolutionary propagandist. His four *Letters of a Savoyard Royalist to his Compatriots* of the summer of 1793 had been directed to two audiences: he had sought to strengthen loyalty to the Sardinian monarchy among the population of French-occupied Savoy and thus aid in its reconquest by a joint Austrian-Sardinian offensive that summer, and he had also aimed to persuade influential people in Turin of the necessity of political reforms to meet the challenge of the French Revolution. By the fall of 1793, Maistre's hopes were crushed on both counts. The military offensive failed miserably, and Maistre learned that sale of his *Letters* had been prohibited in Turin, apparently on the grounds that they were anti-royalist.

Despite the setback, Maistre remained committed to the counter-revolutionary cause. He continued to believe, as he put it in the preface of a combined edition of his Savoyard Letters and an earlier pamphlet, that "It is necessary to work on opinion, [and] to undeceive people of the metaphysical theories with which they have been done so much harm."[3] By late March 1794, he had prepared a draft of a "fifth Savoyard letter" and sent it to a French émigré bishop in Fribourg for criticism. The reader, François de Bovet, the pre-revolutionary bishop

of Sisteron, returned the manuscript and his critique in mid-April. In his commentary, Bovet remarked that "it will appear extraordinary that in treating *ex professo* the question of the sovereignty of the people, the author has said nothing of J.-J. Rousseau."[4] Partly as a consequence of Bovet's criticisms, and partly, it appears, as a consequence of changing political circumstances following the downfall of Robespierre, Maistre rethought his project and abandoned the idea of publishing a "fifth Savoyard letter." Instead, he undertook a systematic study of Rousseau's famous political works, the *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men* and the *Social Contract*, with a view to refuting the Genevan's ideas on the state of nature, social contract, and popular sovereignty. The two pieces that concern us here, Maistre's essays *On the State of Nature* and *On the Sovereignty of the People*, were the product of this activity. More systematically than the political pamphlets he had written before, the essays offer a sustained critique of the ideological foundations of the Revolution; in attacking the theory of popular sovereignty Maistre was aiming at the keystone of the revolutionary government's claim to legitimacy.

Before examining the content of these two essays, we should note that circumstances also account for Maistre's decision to abandon their completion and publication. By the summer of 1796, with the Directory's defeat of Babeuf's egalitarian plot in May and with evidence of a growing royalist movement that hoped for victory in the elections scheduled for early 1797, refutation of Rousseau became less urgent than providing support to the royalist movement in France. Consequently, Maistre turned his attention to the composition of his *Considerations on France*, a work that appeared in April 1797 and that made his reputation as an apologist of throne and altar.[5] Some ideas and even some passages from the anti-Rousseau essays were incorporated into the new work, but the focus had changed, and Maistre would never return to the task of a systematic critique of this particular adversary.

When Joseph de Maistre took up Bishop Bovet's challenge and began a close examination of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's political writings, he was not, of course, a complete stranger to the ideas and influence of the Genevan. No educated and informed European living in the second half of the eighteenth century could have been unaware of Rousseau. Moreover, Chambéry was French-speaking and less than seventy-five kilometres from Geneva. Maistre's birth in 1753 occurred only a few years after Rousseau's residence in Chambéry with Madame de Warens, and although Maistre never mentions this episode in Rousseau's life, he could hardly have been unaware of it.

The son of a magistrate, Joseph de Maistre's education and career prior to the Revolution had been conventional enough for a man of his birth and position.[6] Joseph's father was a Senator of the Senate of Savoy (a judicial body analogous to a French *parlement*) who had been made a count in 1778 for his contribution to the codification of the laws of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia. Joseph himself, after early training by the Jesuits and at the local *Collège*, completed his legal training in Turin, and returned to Chambéry and an appointment as a junior officer of the Senate. Like other young magistrates he was expected to take his turn at delivering orations on formal occasions in the life of the Senate. A "Discourse on Virtue," which Maistre delivered to the Senate in 1777 when he was twenty-four years old, displays a vocabulary, a literary style, and a celebration of "sensibility" that suggests Rousseau's influence.[7] It even contains a seemingly Rousseauistic portrayal of the origins of society:

> Picture for yourself the birth of society: see these men, around the sacred altars of the country just being born; all voluntarily abdicate a part of their liberty; all consent to allow their particular wills to be curbed under the sceptre of the general will.[8]

A few years later, in an unpublished memoir, Maistre questioned the moral value of contemporary natural science in phrases that appear to echo Rousseau's *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*. In this piece, Maistre was acidly critical of "supposedly wise men, ridiculously proud of some childish discoveries ... [who] take care not to condescend to asking themselves once in their lives what they are and what is their place in the universe."[9] As late as 1788, in another unpublished memoir, Maistre quoted the "eloquent Rousseau" with approval.[10]

With the advent of the French Revolution, however, we find evidence that Maistre's attitude towards Rousseau was becoming decidedly hostile. In a private notebook containing undated reflections on a book on sovereignty published in 1788, Maistre took note of "Rousseau's terrible maxim that sovereignty resides essentially in the people."[11] This same notebook entry offers a clue to another author who appears to have influenced Maistre's views on the issue of popular sovereignty. Immediately following the remark just cited, Maistre continues: "But De Lolme, in his excellent book on the Constitution of England, has proved the contrary by establishing that the people is a Legislator equally inept and fanatic."[12] Still another author who most likely influenced Maistre's thinking about popular government was Edmund Burke, whose *Reflections on the Revolution in France* Maistre had read by early 1791.[13] Burke, of course, was no admirer of Rousseau.[14]

In his "Savoyard letters" of 1793, Maistre categorized the revolutionary slogans, "sovereignty of the people, the rights of man, liberty, [and] equality," as fatally seductive, and ridiculed the "absurd" theory of popular sovereignty, but he did not name Rousseau specifically among the philosophers he condemned for misleading people by preaching the possibility of a radical transformation of government and society. It took his episcopal critic to focus Maistre's attention on Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Both Bovet's challenge and Maistre's response reflect Rousseau's reputation by 1794 as one of the major intellectual architects of the Revolution. Prior to the Revolution, the "cult of Rousseau" had been based mostly on his novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Emile* (his work on education), and his *Confessions*. At least one authority maintains that "Jean-Jacques Rousseau as prophet and founder of the French Revolution was a creation of the Revolution itself."[15] Whether the appropriation of Rousseau's name by the revolutionaries was justified or not, Bovet was probably following the general perception of the time in singling out Rousseau as the most dangerous theorist and popularizer of the idea of popular sovereignty. Perhaps reluctantly,[16] since as we shall see he was far from hostile to many aspects of Rousseau's thought, Maistre dutifully directed his energies to refuting the popular symbol of sovereignty of the people.

As we find it in these unfinished and unpolished essays of 1794–96, Maistre's critique of Rousseau's political writings is neither sympathetic nor sophisticated.[17] Modern commentators go to great lengths to discover various levels of meaning in Rousseau's statements and try to reconcile the apparent contradictions among his various pronouncements.[18] Maistre, in contrast, either because he is genuinely irritated, or as a polemical tactic, accuses Rousseau of confused thinking and confused use of language. He claims that refuting Rousseau "is less a question of proving that he is wrong than proving that he does not know what he wants to prove."[19] He charges Rousseau with using words without understanding them, defining them or changing definitions to suit his own purposes, and using abstract words in their popular sense. "The best way to refute this so-called philosopher," Maistre asserts, "is to analyze him and translate him into philosophical language; then we are surprised we have ever been able to give him a moment's attention."[20] It must be admitted, however, that many of Maistre's attempts to sustain these particular charges against Rousseau are marred by tendentious readings and, on occasion, by truncated citations or by citations taken out of context.[21] Perhaps these faults would have been corrected if Maistre had edited the essays for

publication; on the other hand, these same polemical tactics characterize much of what Maistre published in his lifetime.

On the State of Nature, Maistre's detailed critique of Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality*, focuses on Rousseau's belief in the natural goodness of man. Identifying this belief as the basic premise of Rousseau's system, Maistre reduces his opponent's position to the following syllogism: "Man is naturally good if his vices do not spring from his nature. Moreover, all man's vices stem from society which is against nature: *Therefore man is naturally good*." "You can leaf through Rousseau as much you like," Maistre concludes, "and you will find nothing more on this question; it is on this pile of sand that the great edifices of the *Discourse on Inequality*, *Emile*, and even part of the *Social Contract* rests."[22]

Maistre ridicules Rousseau's attempts to describe man in a "state of nature," and insists that man is by nature a social being. Arguing from "the anatomy of man, his physical and moral faculties," and from historical evidence, Maistre maintains that man outside or prior to society would not be truly man.[23] Civilization and nature should not be opposed, according to Maistre, because it is "absurd to imagine that the creator gave a being faculties that it must never develop."[24] "Human art, or perfectibility," Maistre maintains, echoing Burke, "is thus the nature of man."[25]

In this piece at least, Maistre appears willing to engage the debate on his opponent's terms. Rousseau set aside the Biblical account of man's origins and tried to support his ideas on the origins and development of human society from what we would today call anthropological evidence.[26] While Maistre remains committed to the historical accuracy of Genesis, he is quite prepared to argue his case on the basis of other kinds of historical and literary evidence. In opposition to Rousseau, however, Maistre insists that history teaches us "that man is a social being who has always been observed in society."[27]

At the same time, Maistre's insistence on perfectibility as a human characteristic suggests agreement with Rousseau on the notion of human development over a long period of time.[28] Maistre differs with Rousseau, however, in his judgment about man's present condition. While Rousseau contends that much of contemporary society is unnatural and implies that it is man's social development that is to blame, Maistre argues that "the order that we see is the natural order."[29]

Despite these seemingly contradictory judgments about the "naturalness" of modern society, Maistre and Rousseau are in fact in rather close agreement about the nature of the political problem. The

vocabulary and the approach are different, with Rousseau repudiating the old Christian explanation of original sin and Maistre continuing to maintain that it "explains everything," but for both the state is a necessary remedy for human failings.

Notwithstanding his repeated attacks on Rousseau for rejecting sociability as a natural human characteristic, Maistre himself portrays human nature as combining both social and anti-social impulses.[30] As he puts it in *On the State of Nature*, citing Marcus Aurelius, "*man is social, because he is reasonable*; but let us add: *but he is corrupt in his essence, and in consequence he must have a government.*"[31] As developed in this essay and his other works, Maistre's political theory is firmly based on the traditional concept of original sin.

Rousseau's position is somewhat more complex. In his analysis, one of the characteristics of pre-social human beings is a benign love of self he calls *amour de soi-même*. In the social state, however, this is transformed into an aggressive form of selfishness Rousseau calls *amour-propre*. In his description in the *Discourse on Inequality*, man moves from the golden age of "nascent society ... to the most horrible state of war."[32] Since the human race is "no longer able to turn back or renounce the unhappy acquisitions it has made,"[33] the great problem of politics is to create order artificially. In effect, while Maistre blames original sin and Rousseau blames *amour-propre*, both believe powerful forces are required to preserve social unity and public order.[34] Both need the state, but they differ in their accounts of how the state comes into existence.

Maistre's critique of Rousseau's account in the *Social Contract* is the main theme of Maistre's essay *On the Sovereignty of the People*. This essay makes it clear that Maistre's objections to Rousseau's ideas about the state of nature and the origins of society were rooted in his belief that these ideas formed the basis of Rousseau's theory of popular sovereignty. Citing the early chapter of the *Social Contract* where Rousseau refers to the social pact that precedes the act by which a people chose their king and that forms "the true basis of society,"[35] Maistre objects and insists that "if the social order comes from nature, there is no social pact."[36] It should be noted, of course, that Maistre's critique assumes that Rousseau's theory of popular sovereignty is based on classical social contract theory, according to which human beings in a pre-social state of nature were already fully autonomous moral agents capable of entering a contract to establish society and political institutions. This critique ignores the extent to which Rousseau challenged traditional contract theory and many of its assumptions.[37] In effect, Maistre failed to appreciate the extent to which Rousseau utilized the notion of a pre-social "state of nature" as a means of

showing how the development of humanity is a complex and dynamic pyschological, social, and historical process.[38]

Maistre notes Rousseau's attempt to distinguish the act by which people chose their king from the act that "forms the true basis of society," but denies that this is a valid distinction. In Maistre's view it is impossible to separate the two ideas of society and sovereignty: they are "born together."[39] He believes that "we must dismiss to the realm of the imagination the ideas of choice and deliberation in the establishment of society and sovereignty."[40] Against Rousseau's attempts to link the origin and legitimacy of sovereignty to the will of the populace, Maistre insists that "each form of sovereignty is the immediate result of the will of the Creator, like sovereignty in general."[41] This is the theory that Maistre will later elaborate in his curiously entitled *Essay on the Generative Principle of Political Constitutions and other Human Institutions.*[42] The consequence of Maistre's view, of course, is to invest every established government with a kind of divine right to rule and to make any thought of revolt border on blasphemy.

Given Maistre's reverence towards established authority, it is easy to appreciate why he was scandalized by both the substance and spirit of Rousseau's political writings. He accuses all the philosophes of a culpable spirit of insubordination. "It is not *this* authority that they detest," he charges, "but *authority* itself; they cannot endure any."[43] However, it is Rousseau in particular who is repeatedly singled out on this score. "It is Rousseau," he writes, who "breathed everywhere scorn for authority and the spirit of insurrection, ... who traced the code of anarchy and who ... posed the disastrous principles of which the horrors we have seen are only the immediate consequences."[44] Maistre blames the whole "philosophic sect" for having "made" the French Revolution, but assigns special blame to Voltaire and Rousseau. Voltaire, he believes, "undermined the political structure by corrupting morals," while Rousseau "undermined morality by corrupting the political system."[45]

Rousseau's fault, Maistre believes, is as much moral as philosophical. He suggests that:

> The sentiment that dominates all Rousseau's works is a certain plebeian anger that excites him against every kind of superiority ... weak and surly, he spent his life spouting insults to the great ... His character explains his political heresies; it is not the truth that inspires him, it is ill humour. Whenever he sees greatness and especially hereditary greatness, he fumes and loses his faculty of reason.[46]

There are modern commentators who have made the same diagnosis of the emotional dynamics of Rousseau's response to authority,[47] but perhaps the point to note here is that in contrast to many contemporary polemicists who opposed Rousseau by denouncing the squalor of his personal life, this is about as close as Maistre ever came to an *ad hominem* attack on his opponent.

In any case, there can be no doubt about Maistre's opposition to the apparently democratic implications of Rousseau's political theories. This opposition is clearly evident in Maistre's detailed criticisms of Rousseau's assessments of the relative merits of democratic, aristocratic, and monarchical forms of government. Maistre, of course, defends monarchical government and aristocratic privilege. Despite this basic disagreement over political forms, however, what should be stressed is Maistre's acceptance of many of Rousseau's assumptions about the nature and tasks of political authority.

Maistre's discussion of Rousseau's concept of the "legislator" is particularly revealing in this respect. He begins, as usual, by accusing Rousseau of having confused the question in a "most intolerable way."[48] He ridicules Rousseau's description of the legislator's task, and finds Rousseau's talk about "altering the human constitution" pretentious, and yet he never attempts to refute the essential feature of Rousseau's formulation. According to Rousseau, the legislator must bring the individual will into conformity with the general will so that the individual can be incorporated into something greater than himself and enjoy a new communal existence.[49] Maistre's understanding of the function of the legislator seems no different. For example, extolling the Jesuit order as a beautifully conceived political creation, Maistre remarks: "No founder ever better attained his goal, none succeeded more perfectly in the annihilation of particular wills to establish the general will and that *common reason* that is the generative and conserving principle of all institutions whatsoever, large or small."[50] Elsewhere Maistre states that "man's first need is that his nascent reason be curbed ... and lose itself in the national reason, so that it changes its individual existence into another common existence."[51]

Maistre shared Rousseau's admiration for the great legislators of antiquity. Both had a particularly high regard for Lycurgus, the legendary Spartan lawgiver; both thought that the Spartan system of education and military training was an ideal means of producing perfectly socialized citizens.[52]

Maistre disagrees with Rousseau, however, about the ultimate source of a great legislator's authority. When Rousseau considers the magnitude of the legislator's task, he is led to exclaim that "gods would be needed to give laws to men."[53] Maistre's reply is, "not at

all, it takes only one."[54] Rousseau makes his legislator a god-like figure, but his concept remains essentially secular. Maistre claims that it is God himself who is more or less directly responsible for the founding of states. Rousseau may of have spoken of the legislator's mission, but Maistre professes to believe that there really are great men, veritable elect, sent by God, and invested with an extraordinary power to found nations.[55]

We can note as well Maistre's reaction to Rousseau's suggestion that great legislators have used religion as an instrument of politics, honouring "the gods with their own wisdom."[56] Though he quibbles with the form of Rousseau's statement, he thinks that Rousseau has shown "perfectly how and why all legislators have had to speak in the name of the divinity."[57] At one with Rousseau in admiring the permanence of the Judaic and Muhammadan codes, Maistre argues that the reason for their long survival is that "in the Koran as in the Bible, politics is divinized and human reason, crushed by the religious ascendancy, cannot insinuate its divisive and corrosive poison into the mechanisms of government, so that citizens are believers whose loyalty is exalted to faith, and obedience to enthusiasm and fanaticism."[58]

Significantly, Maistre makes no attempt to critique Rousseau's controversial chapter on civic religion. In fact, it is quite clear that he is in agreement with Rousseau's belief that there must be a body of "sentiments of sociability without which it is impossible to be a good Citizen or a faithful subject."[59] Maistre speaks frankly of the need for a "state religion" to inculcate "useful prejudices."[60] In an extreme statement of the thesis he writes: "Government is a true religion: it has its dogmas, its mysteries, and its ministers. To annihilate it or submit it to the discussion of each individual is the same thing; it lives only through national reason, that is to say through political faith, which is a *creed*."[61]

Rousseau had distinguished between the "religion of man," which he described most fully in the "Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar" in *Emile*, and the "religion of the citizen," which he prescribed in the *Social Contract*. Although it might be possible to characterize the former as a kind of non-denominational Christianity, in the *Social Contract* he explicitly condemns historical Christianity as incompatible with loyal citizenship. He maintains that Christianity, by "giving men two legislative systems, two leaders, and two fatherlands, subjects them to contradictory duties, and prevents them from being simultaneously devout men and Citizens."[62] Though Maistre does not challenge Rousseau on this point in his unfinished essay *On the Sovereignty of the People*, it is clear from his later works that he disagrees fundamentally with Rousseau's political critique of Christianity. It is not that he

accepts the idea of separation of church and state that Rousseau condemns, it is rather that he believes that Christianity *is* a civil religion.[63] While he might join Rousseau in admiring the pagan city-states of antiquity, Maistre believes that in Europe there is no alternative to Christianity. This view would be clearly articulated in Maistre's 1798 "Reflections on Protestantism in its Relations with Sovereignty":

> Christianity is the religion of Europe ... it is mingled with all our institutions ... it is the hand of this religion that fashioned these new nations [of Europe]. The cross is on all the crowns, all the codes begin with its symbol. The kings are *anointed*, the priests are *magistrates*, the priesthood is an *order*, the empire is *sacred*, the religion is *civil*. The two powers are merged; each lends the other part of its strength, and, despite the quarrels that have divided these two sisters, they cannot live separated.[64]

So where Rousseau diagnoses a fatal conflict between throne and altar in Christianity, Maistre argues a fundamental unity of purpose, despite historical disputes that he has to acknowledge.[65]

Maistre's critique of Rousseau's political theorizing, then, attacked Rousseau's idiosyncratic political and philosophical vocabulary, his belief in the natural goodness of man, and his theory of social contract with its apparently democratic implications. However, Maistre was in explicit agreement with Rousseau's ideas on the legislator's role in the founding of the state, and on the utility of religion as an instrument of rule. He also accepted Rousseau's ideas about the absolute, indivisible, and inalienable nature of sovereignty.[66] And in so far as Rousseau accepted Montesquieu's ideas about the influence of climate, geography, and culture on forms of government, Maistre agreed completely.[67]

Perhaps equally significant are other areas where Maistre failed even to raise an issue with Rousseau. For example, he took no notice of Rousseau's virtual abandonment of any meaningful concept of natural law.[68] It is no coincidence that one of the most striking characteristics of Maistre's own political theory (particularly if it is considered in relation to traditional Catholic theory) is an almost complete neglect of natural-law concepts.[69] Nor did Maistre object to Rousseau's voluntaristic definition of law.[70] Maistre's own understanding of law was equally voluntaristic; in his *St Petersburg Dialogues* he would define law as "the will of a legislator, made manifest to his subjects to be the rule of their conduct."[71]

Maistre himself unwittingly admitted the extent to which he agreed with Rousseau on the level of many basic assumptions. At one point in *On the Sovereignty of the People*, after quoting Rousseau's "remarkable

words" with approval, Maistre adds this exasperated comment: "Such is Rousseau's character; he often discovers remarkable truths and expresses them better than anyone else, but these truths are sterile in his hands. ... No one shapes their materials better than he, and no one builds more poorly. Everything is good except his systems."[72]

The two essays presented here are the only works in which Maistre made a systematic effort to refute Rousseau's ideas. In the writings published during Maistre's lifetime, there are scattered references to Rousseau, usually, but not always, derogatory. In his *Considerations on France*, written in 1796, of six specific references to Rousseau, all but one involve citing Rousseau with approval in support of Maistre's own argument.[73] A footnote explains that "one must keep a close watch on this man and surprise him whenever he absent-mindedly lets the truth slip out."[74] References in later works tend to be more uniformly critical.[75] However, close analysis of some of the main themes of these later works suggests that Maistre may have remained more akin to Rousseau than he would likely have admitted.

For example, we have seen how Maistre tended to agree with Rousseau on the political utility of religion. In his *Considerations on France* Maistre claims that religious ideas form "the unique base of all durable institutions."[76] Rousseau's comments about the duration of the Judaic and Muhammadan codes are quoted in support of this idea. Then Maistre goes on to give the concept his own characteristic twist: "Every time a man puts himself ... in harmony with the Creator ... and produces any institution whatsoever in the name of the Divinity, then no matter what his individual weakness, ignorance, poverty, obscurity of birth ... he participates in some manner in the power whose instrument he has made himself. He produces works whose strength and permanence astonish reason."[77]

In his *Essay on the Generative Principle of Political Constitutions* of 1809, Maistre deliberately transforms this idea into a dictum, stating that "one may even generalize this assertion and declare that without exception, *no institution whatsoever can endure if it is not founded on religion.*"[78] This time there is no reference to Rousseau. Instead Maistre calls on history, fable, and the testimony of Plato to support his argument. The metaphysical extension of the idea, the notion that "no human institution can endure unless supported by Him who supports all,"[79] becomes the theme of the entire work. The "generative principle of political constitutions" becomes God himself.

Maistre's development of a shared idea seems to have led to a "theocratic" political theory diametrically opposed to Rousseau's. Defending traditional authority against the democratic and secular thrust of the French Revolution (and Rousseau), Maistre ends up practically

equating the state with God. And yet, as has already been suggested, the obvious conflict between the theorists of democracy and theocracy conceals a more complex relationship.[80]

For example, while Maistre reviled Rousseau as an irresponsible prophet of democracy, modern commentators have noted the extent to which Rousseau was, at best, an "ambivalent democrat." Rousseau may have denied the legitimacy of traditional authorities and insisted on the right of all citizens to participate in political decisions, but his wish to be free and to make others free was accompanied by a profound distrust of man's capacity for autonomy.[81] Some have even suggested that "totalitarian" possibilities were at least implicit in Rousseau's thought.[82]

The possibility springs partly from the logic of Rousseau's ideas. As Maistre sensed, the postulate of man's natural innocence is fundamental to Rousseau's political theory. One of the implications of the traditional Christian doctrine of original sin is that the state, like every other human creation, always remains imperfect. Rousseau, denying original sin, could envisage an "ideal city" to which men could owe absolute loyalty. In his version of human development, man begins in a state of primitive innocence. Entry into society brings about vices that lead eventually to the present condition of mankind, which Rousseau finds so unsatisfactory. While recognizing that it is impossible to return to primitive innocence, Rousseau seems to have imagined that a future state of human perfection might be achieved through the political means outlined in his *Social Contract*.[83]

The glimpses we get of Rousseau's "ideal city," in the *Social Contract*, in his prescriptions for Corsica and Poland, and in his description of Wolmar's Clarens in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, reveal a strikingly "totalitarian" ideal. As Lester Crocker has shown, four basic characteristics of "totalitarian" societies are all present in Rousseau's Utopias: a charismatic "guide" or "leader"; an organic ideal of community in which all owe unlimited loyalty and obedience to the collectivity; the precept and goal of unanimity; and lastly, numerous techniques used to mobilize and control the minds, wills, and emotions of the people.[84] Without speculating about the psychological reasons, it seems clear that Rousseau felt an emotional impulse towards a "total" kind of society. Personal feelings of insecurity and alienation fed a desperate longing for a society in which the tension between man's self-will and his social nature could be resolved. In despair over that "conflict between the individual and the law which plunges the state into continual civil war," he was tempted to discount any viable middle ground between "the most austere democracy and the most complete Hobbism."[85] If the first could not be achieved, Rousseau

was ready, at least in the letter to Mirabeau quoted here, to recommend "arbitrary despotism, the most arbitrary that can be devised." "I would wish," he wrote, "the despot to be God."[86] Now these particular lines may represent no more than a momentary loss of hope on Rousseau's part, but they are illustrative of a powerful desire to escape the conflicts of an imperfect world.

For Maistre, too, personal insecurity seems to have inspired a yearning for guaranteed political security. He was horrified by the violence of the French Revolution. Pride, he felt, had led to an unjustifiable questioning of traditional values and institutions. Whatever the problems of any given society, revolution must be repudiated as an unacceptable solution.[87] Yet Maistre also had his vision of a possible future society (in the image of the past, to be sure) in which social conflict would be resolved. If men would conquer their rebellious pride, if throne and altar provided each other appropriate mutual support, if men would recognize the harsh lessons of history, they could hope for a more peaceful society.

Like Rousseau and other philosophes who endeavored to escape from history by deciphering its design, Maistre sought some principle of order in the moral world. Rousseau's understanding of the world was in terms of a radically secular humanism that tended to see all human problems as essentially political problems amenable to solution by purely political means.[88] The "ideal city" of the *Social Contract* could be taken as a complete answer, a kind of "secular salvation." At least one commentator has seen in Rousseau's vision an early version of Marx's dream of a future classless society in which the historical dialectic is finally stilled.[89]

Maistre's view of the world saw history ruled by providence. However he thought he could discern the principles of this providential order, and he intimated that understanding and acceptance of these principles would ensure escape from revolutionary turmoil. If Rousseau's Utopia prefigures the Marxist vision, Joseph de Maistre may be seen as authentic forerunner of the "integral Catholics" of twentieth-century France. These people, too, looked to "total" answers, not only to religious questions, but to all political and social problems as well. If only men would recognize the "truth," the authentic teachings of Catholicism and papal encyclicals (or their particular interpretation thereof), humanity could expect a peaceful and orderly life in this world (as well as the next). I have argued elsewhere that Maistre's reaction to the French Revolution was not a particularly "Catholic" response, on the grounds that his political theories were built largely on the premises of eighteenth-century thought and not on the natural-law tradition that has generally characterized Catholic political philos-

ophy.[90] Yet Maistre's response to the revolutionary challenge can be seen as a prototype of at least one kind of Catholic reaction to the modern world.[91]

Joseph de Maistre assailed Rousseau's political theories because for him they epitomized the repudiation of traditional authority and the movement towards democracy that he thought characterized the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Ironically, he never recognized the possibility that Rousseau's approach might replace one kind of authoritarian control by another. The implications of Rousseau's thought were disguised by his language. Rousseau continued to speak of freedom even while he described a system of cultural engineering that could reduce freedom to an induced illusion.[92] Maistre complained of Rousseau's abuse of language, but on this fundamental issue he never penetrated his opponent's rhetoric. For both thinkers the ideal state would involve a Spartan kind of "total" socialization. Rousseau chose to call such complete identification of the individual with the collectivity "freedom." One might suggest that Maistre was less dangerous. Arguing that the philosophes had raised false hopes about the possibilities for a freer society, Maistre called for submission to traditional authorities and traditional religion. No reader could mistake his advocacy of authority and religion for anything but what it was. And in so far as Christianity looks to an authority above and beyond the secular ruler, Maistre's political system left the individual a basis for making a stand against the authority of the state.

Joseph de Maistre's thought was grounded, at least in part, in the intellectual world Rousseau had helped to create. He was reacting to some of the same problems that had stimulated Rousseau. Rousseau had sensed the breakdown of traditional religious and political concepts and institutions, and had sought to provide an alternative. Maistre lived through the collapse, and hoped to restore order by reviving an idealized Ancien Régime. Rousseau's answer was a Utopian proposal for a democratic polity created by a mythical legislator and legitimized by a mysterious general will. Maistre's response has been characterized as an equally mysterious counter-Utopia in which divine providence created and legitimized the authority of popes, monarchs, and aristocrats.[93]

From a different, very helpful, and stimulating perspective, Graeme Garrard argues that Rousseau should be intepreted as an important precursor of the Counter-Enlightenment Maistre embodied.[94] Although neither Joseph de Maistre nor the popular eighteenth-century image of Rousseau made any significant distinction between him and the other philosophes, in fact, of course, Rousseau was their bitter opponent on many issues. From the publication of his *Discourse on the*

Sciences and the Arts in 1751, Rousseau openly challenged many of the Enlightenment's assumptions and objectives. Despite Maistre's denunciations of Rousseau's ideas and influence, they both shared a profound concern for what they both took "to be the disastrous social and political ramifications of eighteenth-century ideas."[95] Maistre can be seen as selectively appropriating "many of Rousseau's arguments to support his own, more radical critique of the Enlightenment."[96]

The two essays presented here clearly illustrate some of the most important parallels Garrard finds between Rousseau's partial critique and Maistre's more comprehensive assault. As we have seen, though they differed in their accounts of the origins of society and sovereignty, they both (for somewhat different reasons) ended up with a decidedly Hobbesian view of contemporary society. Both concluded that "social life is, at best, always a precarious balance," and that the Enlightenment project of liberation of the individual from moral, religious, and social constraints is "more likely to exacerbate social conflict than to result in liberation."[97] Both saw the need for a strengthening of what Rousseau called "sentiments of sociability," and both prescribed somewhat similar means. In particular, both, as we have seen, called for an integration of religion and politics. In addition, as Garrard demonstrates, both felt a need to inculcate a strong sense of patriotism and to utilize education for this purpose.[98] Exploration of these last two topics would require going beyond Maistre's two anti-Rousseau essays (and the Rousseau works he examines in these essays), but both themes provide solid evidence for Garrard's thesis. Rousseau and Maistre were, as Garrard shows, surprisingly in accord in opposing the rationalism, individualism, and cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment, despite their fundamental disagreements on the nature of Christianity and on political forms.

In conclusion, although I have used the title *Against Rousseau* to bring together my translations of the two essays that Maistre composed in his attempt to come to terms with the best-known theorist of popular sovereignty of his time, it should be apparent by now that there is a fascinatingly complex relationship between these antagonists. I hope that making Maistre's essays available in translation will encourage others to explore more facets of these complicated issues.

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1 See, for example, Isaiah Berlin's comments on "Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism" in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: John Murray 1990), 91–174, as well as his Introduction to

Maistre's *Considerations on France* (Cambridge University Press 1994) where he sugggets ways in which Maistre was "really ultramodern." Owen Bradley's recent Ph D dissertation (Cornell University 1992), "Logics of Violence: The Social and Political Thought of Joseph de Maistre," also stresses Maistre's modernity.

2 See Graeme Garrard, "Rousseau, Maistre, and the Counter-Enlightenment," *History of Political Thought* 15 (Spring 1994).

3 *Oeuvres complètes de Joseph de Maistre* (Lyons: Vitte et Perussel 1884–87) (hereafter cited as *OC*), 7:39.

4 Bovet to Maistre, 13 April 1794. Cited in Jean-Louis Darcel, "Cinquième Lettre d'un Royaliste Savoisien," *Revue des études maistriennes* no. 4 (1978): 81 (hereafter cited as *REM*).

5 See Jean-Louis Darcel's critical edition of *Considérations sur la France* (Geneva: Slatkine 1980), and my translation (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press 1974, and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994). Citations in this volume will be to the 1994 Cambridge edition (hereafter cited as CUP ed.).

6 On Maistre's life, see Richard A. Lebrun, *Joseph de Maistre: An Intellectual Militant* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 1988).

7 For thoughtful discussions of Maistre's early "Rousseauism," see Jean Roussel, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau en France après la Révolution 1795–1830* (Paris: Colin 1972), 93–100, and Jean-Louis Darcel's Introduction to Joseph de Maistre's *De l'Etat de Nature*, in *REM* no. 2 (1976): 27–32. Both these authors agree that the young Maistre was influenced more by the style than the content of Rousseau's writings.

8 Cited in François Descostes, *Joseph de Maistre orateur* (Chambéry: Perrin 1896), 14.

9 *Mémoire au duc de Brunswick*, in *Ecrits Maçonniques de Joseph de Maistre*, ed. Jean Rebotton (Geneva: Slatkine 1983), 106.

10 "De la vénalité des charges dans une monarchie," Annex to Jean-Louis Darcel, "Joseph de Maistre et la réforme de l'état en 1788," *REM* no. 11 (1990): 66.

11 From notes on *Principe fondamental du Droit des Souverains* (1788) in a notebook entitled *Miscellanea*. Maistre family archives.

12 Jean Louis de Lolme's *La Constitution de l'Angleterre* (1771) was an enthusiastic and extremely popular description of the English political system. The Genevan author had been a disciple of Rousseau before his self-exile to England in 1768 and his "conversion" to admiration for the English system of "liberty." In his book he affirms his own ideas of liberty and representative government in opposition to Rousseau's ideas. See Jean-Pierre Machelon, *Les Idées politiques de J.L. de Lolme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1969).

13 "Have you read Calonne, Mounier, and the admirable Burke? What do you think of the way this rude senator treates the great gambling-den of the Manège and all the *baby* legislators? For myself, I am delighted, and I do not know how to tell you how he has reinforced my anti-democratic and anti-Gallican ideas. My aversion for everything that is being done in France

becomes horror. I understand very well how systems, fermenting in so many human heads, are turned into passions." Maistre to Henry Costa, 21 January 1791. *OC*, 9:11.

14 Contrasting English respect for tradition with French enthusiasm for the philosophes, Burke had written: "We have not ... lost the generosity and dignity of thinking of the fourteenth century, nor as yet have we subtilized ourselves into savages. We are not the converts of Rousseau." *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Penguin 1969), 181. On the other hand there were striking similarities between Burke and Rousseau. See David Cameron, *The Social Thought of Rousseau and Burke: A Comparative Study* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1973).

15 Gordon McNeil, "The Anti-Revolutionary Rousseau," *American Historical Review* 58 (1953): 808. See also: Gordon H. McNeil, "The Cult of Rousseau and the French Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6 (1945): 197–212; Joan McDonald, *Rousseau and the French Revolution 1762-1791* (London: Athlone Press 1965); Norman Hampson, *Will & Circumstance: Montesquieu, Rousseau and the French Revolution* (Norman Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press 1983); and Mark Hulliung, *The Autocritique of the Enlightenment: Rousseau and the Philosophes* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press 1994).

16 As Darcel notes, Maistre appears more at his ease in the portions of these manuscripts where he goes beyond a strict refutation of Rousseau. See Darcel's edition of *De l'Etat de Nature*, 137n83.

17 The balance of this introduction is based on my earlier attempt to assess the relationship between these two writers; see Richard A. Lebrun, "Joseph de Maistre and Rousseau," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 88 (1972): 881–98.

18 See, in particular, Roger D. Masters, *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1968), and Victor Goldschmidt, *Anthropologie et politique; les principes du système de Rousseau* (Paris: Librarie Philosophique J. Vrin 1974).

19 *On the State of Nature*; see p. 7 below.

20 Ibid., 19.

21 Darcel, in the notes to his critical editions of the two anti-Rousseau pieces, points out specific instances of these abusive tactics.

22 *On the State of Nature*, p. 35 below.

23 Ibid., 29. Rousseau's treatment of the "state of nature," has, of course, been the subject of endless debate. Maistre complained of Rousseau's apparent confusion on his topic, but, at least for polemical purposes, assumed that Rousseau was talking about the state of nature as an historical period preceding the origins of society. As Rousseau describes him, however, pre-social man is no more than an innocent brute. For Rousseau, as for Maistre, man can be truly human (in the sense of becoming a moral being) only in society. See his *Discourse on Inequality*, where he says: "It seems at first that men in that state, not having among themselves any kind of moral relationship or known duties, could be neither good nor evil, and had neither vices nor virtues." Trans. from *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, ed.

Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, 4 vols., (Hanover and London: University Press of New England 1992–94) (hereafter cited as *CW*), 3:334. See as well the "first version" (the *Geneva Manuscript*) of the *Contrat social*, where he writes: "there would have been neither goodness in our hearts nor morality in our actions." (*CW*, 4:78.)

24 *On the State of Nature*, p. 17 below.

25 Ibid. Burke's statement that "art is man's nature" comes from *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*. It may found in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (Boston: Little, Brown 1901), 4:176. Maistre cites Burke's phrase again in *On the Sovereignty of the People*; see p. 52 below. As Darcel points out, Maistre's insistence in these anti-Rousseau pieces on human perfectibility (a neologism forged by the philosophes) appears out of character. In his later works Maistre will stress original sin as the human characteristic that explains everything. See Darcel's edition of *De l'état de Nature*, 133n69. As for Rousseau's use of the term *perfectibilité*, Graeme Garrard points out that he used it to suggest mere "openness to change," whether for better or worse. "Rousseau, Maistre and the Counter-Enlightenment," 102.

26 See Rousseau's note to the *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, in which he proposed systematic anthropological studies. *Oeuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. B. Gagnebin and M. Raymond, 5 vols. (Paris: Gallimard 1959–69) (hereafter cited as Pléiade), 3:213.

27 *On the State of Nature*, p. 23 below.

28 However, neither Rousseau nor Maistre believed in "progress" in the optimistic eighteenth-century sense. For both, the Golden Age was in the past. For Rousseau, see Bertrand de Jouvenel, "Rousseau the pessimistic evolutionist," *Yale French Studies* 27 (1962): 83–96.

29 *On the State of Nature*, p. 31 below.

30 See Garrard, "Rousseau, Maistre, and the Counter-Enlightenment," 104.

31 See below, p. 33.

32 *CW*, 3:53.

33 Ibid.

34 See Garrard, "Rousseau, Maistre, and the Counter-Enlightenment," 105.

35 Bk. I, chap. v. (*CW*, 4:137.)

36 *On the Sovereignty of the People*, p. 50 below.

37 See Garrard, "Rousseau, Maistre, and the Counter-Enlightenment," 101–3.

38 Ibid., 105.

39 *On the Sovereignty of the People*, see p. 53 below.

40 Ibid., 54.

41 Ibid. 57.

42 *Essai sur le principe générateur des constitutions politiques et des autres institutions humaines*, *OC*, 1:225–303. Written in St Petersburg in 1809 and first published in 1814, this work is available in a critical edition prepared by Robert Triomphe (Paris: Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Strasbourg 1959) and in a translation by Elisha Greifer and Laurence M. Porter under the title *On God and Society* (Chicago: Henry Regnery 1959).

43 *On the Sovereignty of the People*, see p. 176 below.

44 Ibid., 106.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 138.
47 See, for example, William H. Blanchard, who argues that Rousseau's "spirit of revolt" must be understood in terms of certain psychological mechanisms in his personality, and that both the style and content of Rousseau's political writings were influenced by these mechanisms. Acknowledging that Rousseau may have been a very talented theoretician, he nevertheless concludes that Rousseau's passion for freedom and justice was flawed by a "deep and unreasoning hatred of all authority" and that "it was his obsessive fear of all authority which drained like a poison into the next generation." *Rousseau and the Spirit of Revolt* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1967), 146.
48 *On the Sovereignty of the People*, p. 60 below.
49 See Rousseau's chapter on the legislator. *Contrat social*, Bk. II, chap. vii.
50 *On the Sovereignty of the People*, p. 95 below.
51 Ibid., 87–8.
52 According to Maistre, Sparta had "the most perfect constitution in antiquity" (ibid., 160). For Rousseau, see his *Considérations sur la Pologne* (Pléiade, 3:157) and Judith N. Shklar, "Rousseau's Two Models: Sparta and the Age of Gold," *Political Science Quarterly* 81 (1966): 25–51. As many have pointed out, Sparta, a highly disciplined state in which control of individuals was carried to a remarkable extreme, was antiquity's closest approach to a "totalitarian" state. See L.G. Crocker, *Rousseau's Social Contract* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University 1968), 48–9. As Darcel observes, Rousseau and Maistre admired Sparta for somewhat different reasons. Rousseau saw Sparta as an exemplar of civic virtue, patriotism, egalitarianism, and frugality. For Maistre, Sparta exemplified the advantages of an unwritten constitution and an alliance of politics and religion. Curiously, neither of these authors, who both detested military regimes, perceived Sparta as a military tyranny. See Darcel's edition of *De l'état de Nature*, 115n32.
53 *Contrat social*, Bk. II, chap. vii (*CW*, 4:154).
54 *On the Sovereignty of the People*, p. 63 below.
55 Ibid., 67.
56 *Contrat social*, Bk. II, chap. vii (*CW*, 4:156).
57 *On the Sovereignty of the People*, p. 64 below.
58 Ibid., 78.
59 *Contrat social*, Bk. IV, chap. viii (*CW*, 4:222).
60 *On the Sovereignty of the People*, p. 87 below.
61 Ibid.
62 *Contrat social*, Bk. IV, chap. viii (*CW*, 4:219).
63 As Graeme Garrard puts it, "Maistre vigorously denies that Christianity results in the division of sovereignty which he, no less than Rousseau, believes must be absolute and indivisible. Indeed, he insists that (in Europe at least) only Christianity is able to prevent such a disastrous split." "Rousseau, Maistre, and the Counter-Enlightenment," 113.

64 "Réflexions sur le Protestantisme dans ses rapports avec la souveraineté," *OC*, 8:64–5.

65 A considerable portion of Maistre's *One the Pope* (1819) was devoted to explaining (or explaining away) historical conflicts between the two powers.

66 *On the Sovereignty of the People*, pp. 115–18 below.

67 Ibid., 156.

68 Rousseau occasionally paid lip service to the notion of natural law, but as many commentators have pointed out, the concept is of no real importance in his political theory. See C.E. Vaughan's comments in *The Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 2 vols., (New York: B. Franklin 1971.), 1:18, and L.G. Crocker, "The Priority of Justice or Law," *Yale French Studies* 28 (1962):34–42. In the preface to the *Discours sur l'inégalité* Rousseau explicitly questioned the way the Academy of Dijon had formulated its prize question ("What is the origin of inequality among men, and is it authorized by natural law?"): "Knowing so little of Nature and agreeing so poorly on the meaning of the word Law, it would be very difficult to agree on a good definition of natural Law" (*CW*, 3:14). Joseph de Maistre berated Rousseau for reversing the order of the question posed by the Academy of Dijon (*On the State of Nature*, p. 4 below), but failed to mention Rousseau's scepticism about the possibility of agreeing on a definition of natural law.

69 See Richard A. Lebrun, *Throne and Altar: The Political and Religious Thought of Joseph de Maistre* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press 1965), 108–12.

70 Rousseau always relates law to will (the general will, to be sure), not to reason or necessary relations.

71 Translated by Richard A. Lebrun (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 1993), 258.

72 *On the Sovereignty of the People*, p. 64 below.

73 It is worth noting that Maistre's *Considerations* was in part a reply to the arguments of liberals such as Benjamin Constant, many of whom were critics of Rousseau. As Garrard points out, Rousseau's arguments against the separation of powers, the representation of sovereignty, and separation of church and state "were as congenial to Maistre's way of thinking as they were abhorrent to that of liberals such as Constant." Garrard concludes that "the urgency of a refutation of Rousseau had been displaced by the need to challenge some of the liberal critics of Rousseau." "Rousseau, Maistre, and the Counter-Enlightenment," 100n9.

74 *Considerations on France* (CUP ed.), 57n8.

75 *Essay on the Generative Principle of Political Constitutions* (1809), two unfavourable references; *On the Pope* (1817), three references, two unfavourable, one neutral; *St Petersburg Dialogues* (1821), eleven references, seven unfavourable, three neutral, and one favourable.

76 *Considerations* (CUP ed.), 42.

77 Ibid., 43–4.

78 *OC*, 1:266n1.

79 Ibid., 285.

80 Other scholars, of course, have commented on the complexities of this relationship. See, especially, Jack Lively's Introduction to his edition of *The Works of Joseph de Maistre* (New York: Macmillan 1965), 40–5, and, most recently, Garrard, "Rousseau, Maistre, and the Counter-Enlightenment."

81 See F. Weinstein and G.M. Platt, *The Wish to Be Free* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1969), especially their chapter, "Rousseau, the Ambivalent Democrat," 82–107.

82 See especially, Crocker, *Rousseau's Social Contract.* Taking "totalitarian" in its etymological sense, Crocker argues that a political philosophy may be described as "totalitarian" if it claims to provide total answers to all human problems and calls for total subordination of the individual to the collectivity. The suggestion that Rousseau's philosophy was "totalitarian" in this sense does not imply that Rousseau would have approved the means used by modern totalitarian states. Nevertheless, Israeli historian J.L. Talmon includes Rousseau among the persons and forces involved in the *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London: M. Secker and Warburg 1952), 48.

83 This argument is developed by Sergio Cotta, "La position du problème de la politique chez Rousseau," in *Etudes sur le Contrat social de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris: Belles Lettres 1964), 183–5.

84 Crocker, *Rousseau's Social Contract*, 163–5.

85 Letter to Mirabeau, 26 July 1767, *The Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 2:161.

86 Ibid. This, in a sense, is Maistre's position.

87 *On the Pope* (*Du Pape*), *OC*, 2:174–5.

88 "I had seen that everything was radically linked to politics, and that, in whatever way it is taken, no people is ever anything but what the nature of its government has made it." *Confessions* (Pléiade, 1:404).

89 Cotta, "La problème de la politique chez Rousseau."

90 Lebrun, *Throne and Altar.*

91 One even finds the same rhetorical images perpetuated. In 1797, calling on Frenchmen to restore their king, Maistre invoked a vision of royal coinage carrying everywhere the device: "Christ commands, He reigns, He is the Victor." *Considerations on France* (CUP ed.), 48. In 1959, a French integralist Catholic entitled his blueprint for the future society *That He May Reign* (Jean Ousset, *Pour qu'il règne* [Paris: La Cité Catholique 1959]).

92 See Crocker, *Rousseau's Social Contract*, 167–9.

93 See Ernest Seillière, "Joseph de Maistre et Jean-Jacques Rousseau," *Séances et Travaux de l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques*, 194 (1920): 321–63, where this antithesis of contrasting mysticisms is developed at some length.

94 "Rousseau, Maistre, and the Counter-Enlightenment," 98.

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid., 105.

98 Ibid., 114–20.

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A Note on the Text

My translations of Joseph de Maistre's "anti-Rousseau" pieces have been made from the excellent critical editions prepared and published by Jean-Louis Darcel. *On the State of Nature* was first published by Charles de Maistre in 1870 with the title *Examen d'un écrit de J.-J. Rousseau sur l'inégalité des conditions parmi les hommes* (in *Oeuvres inédites du Comte J. de Maistre* [Paris: Vaton 1870]). The correct title (from Maistre's manuscript) was established by Jean-Louis Darcel, who published the critical edition of *De l'Etat de nature* in the *Revue des études maistriennes* no. 2 (1976). Similarly, *On the Sovereignty of the People* was also first published by Charles de Maistre in 1870 with the title *Etude sur la Souveraineté*. Darcel established the correct title from Maistre's manuscript and published the critical edition of *De la souveraineté du peuple* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France 1992). I have also consulted the versions published in Maistre's *Oeuvres completes* (Lyon: Vitte et Pessussel 1884), vols. 1 and 7 (practically identical with the 1870 editions). All borrowings from Darcel's editions (matters of fact such as the identification of some of Maistre's citations or obscure persons as well as textual variations from Maistre's manuscripts and the 1870 editions) are identified by the notation "Darcel ed." Only major variations have been noted; those interested in the minor textual variations should consult Darcel's critical editions.

All Maistre's notes have been reproduced, but citations in the notes from various other languages have usually been given in English translation only – unless questions relating to literary style or the accuracy of Maistre's translation of a particular passage were involved. In such cases the original language is also cited. The titles of works by classical authors have usually been cited in English-language versions. All my own explanatory material (whether in the text, in additions to Maistre's notes, or in separate notes) has been placed in square brackets [].

Darcel believes that *On the Sovereignty of the People* was written between early summer 1794 and mid-summer 1795, and *On the State of*

Nature between July 1795 and early 1796. He bases this judgement on the placement of the two pieces in the same manuscript volume as well as on internal evidence suggesting some evolution in Maistre's view between the two pieces. (See Darcel's "Introduction" to his edition of *De l'état de Nature*, pp. 22–3, as well as his "Introduction" to *De la souveraineté du peuple*, p. 7.) My own view is that Maistre may have worked on both essays more or less simultaneously between May 1794 and early 1796. In any case, I have opted for an order of presentation that follows the chronological order of the two works by Rousseau that are in question and the logical order of Maistre's critique of Rousseau's key ideas.

Abbreviations

Bloom	Rousseau, *Emile: or, On Education*, Trans. Alan Bloom (New York: Basic Books 1979)
CUP	Cambridge University Press
CW	*The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, ed. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly (Hanover and London: University Press of New England 1990–94)
Loeb	Loeb Classical Library
OC	*Oeuvres complètes de Joseph de Maistre* (Lyon: Vitte et Perussel 1884-87)
Pléiade	Pléiade edition of the *Oeuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. B. Gagnebin and M. Raymond (Paris: Gallimard 1959-69)
REM	*Revue des études maistriennes*

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On the State of Nature

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CHAPTER ONE

{Man Is Sociable in His Essence}[1]

In 1755[2] the Academy of Dijon proposed the following question: *What is the origin of inequality among men, and is it authorized by natural law*? It is quite evident that this question is poorly posed, for every child knows that it is society that has produced the inequality of conditions. Moreover, what is *natural law*? This is a different question.

So the question that must be asked is: *What is the origin of society? And is man social by his nature?* This question, however, resembles so many others that academies set perfunctorily, that they do not remember the next day, and that was perhaps not even read to them by their secretary.

Whatever the case, Rousseau laid hold of this subject as made expressly for him. Everything that was obscure, everything that exhibited no specific meaning, anything that lent itself to rambling and to equivocation was his particular domain. So he brought forth his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality among Men*, which caused such a sensation at the time, like every paradox supported by an eloquent man, especially if he lives in France and if he is in fashion.

When we examine the work coldly, however, we are astonished by only one thing, which is to know how it was possible to build a volume on such a narrow base. Not only is the substance of the question only skimmed, there is not an idea that really pertains to the subject that is not a commonplace. In short, this is a reply made in a delirium to a question posed in sleep.

[1] [This descriptive chapter title does not appear in Maistre's manuscript; it was added by the editor of the 1870 edition. (Darcel ed.)]

[2] [It was 1753, in fact. The error arises from the confusion between the year the contest was set and the year Rousseau's essay was published. (Darcel ed.)]

After an endlessly long and comic dedicatory epistle, Rousseau gets to the question.

The Academy had asked: 1. *What is the origin of inequality?* 2. *And is it authorized by natural law?* Rousseau reverses the order, but he is careful not to reply directly. If he had treated the question that had been asked, his genius would have been frustrated. In fact, he took the negative side, so that the first part of his work, instead of being philosophical, is purely historical. He supposes that *nature* (this is his great machine) created man in an animal state; and instead of proving this, he amuses himself by describing this state, which for him is the primitive state, or *the state of nature*. For such a description, only poetry is needed. He gets carried away on this point and writes 94 pages[3] before he even thinks of proving what he has advanced.

The second part of the work, which has only 90 pages, begins on page 95. Rousseau starts with the celebrated statement: *The first person who, having fenced off a piece of ground, took it into his head to say* this is mine *and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society.*[4]

However this statement is only a statement, for the general idea of property is much older than territorial property, and society is much older than agriculture. The savage possesses his hut, his bed, his dogs, his hunting and fishing tools, etc., just as we possess our lands and castles. The Kalmuck Tartar, the desert Arab, has ideas of property as clear as the European; he has his sovereigns, his magistrates, his laws, and his cult, and yet, he does not judge it appropriate *to fence off a piece of ground and say this is mine*, because it suits him to be continually changing places. The idea of a nomadic people excludes that of agriculture.

One might think that the author is making a distinction between *civilization* and the establishment of society, and that in the passage cited he only means to speak of the first.

It is true that Rousseau, who expresses himself clearly on nothing, can create this doubt by using the equivocal term *civil society*, but the expression is sufficiently explained by what follows:

[3] [Maistre was using the first edition (Amsterdam: Rey 1755). His page references, which are to this edition, were usually accurate. (Darcel ed.) Where Maistre provided page references, they will be provided here, along with page references to the translation cited.]

[4] [*Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (hereafter as *Discours sur l'inégalité*). *CW*, 3:43.]

But it is very likely that by then things had already come to the point where they could no longer remain as they were. For this idea of property, depending on many prior ideas which could only have arisen successively, was not conceived all at once in the human mind. It was necessary to make much progress, to acquire much industry and enlightenment, and to transmit and augment them from age to age, before arriving at this LAST STAGE OF THE STATE OF NATURE.[5]

The general idea of property, although it had required many centuries to be born, was therefore *the last stage of the state of nature*. So in the passage cited it is simply a question of the establishment of society, since it is a question of the state that immediately follows the last moment of *the state of nature*. It is not necessary therefore to say that society was produced by the first man who decided to enclose a field, since it evidently existed before this act. Therefore Rousseau not only establishes a synchronism between the enclosure of the first field and the establishment of society, he supposes one between this establishment and the general idea of property. In truth I do not think he perceived what he had done; he had not thought about his subject enough for this supposition to have seemed improbable.

After this general assertion given as an axiom, Rousseau enters into the details to show how, by what imperceptible gradations, the inequality of conditions was established among men. Here are the truths he reveals to men.

Although man in the state of nature had scarcely more intercourse with his fellows than with *other* animals, nevertheless, by comparing himself with these bipeds and especially with his *female*, he made THE IMPORTANT DISCOVERY *that their way of thinking and feeling conformed entirely with his own.*[6] He joined with them in a *herd*[7] to take a deer, for example, or for similar reasons;[8] soon they found hard and sharp stones to cut wood and dig the earth. Weary of the shelter that a tree or a cave had furnished, they made huts from branches, which they later decided to daub with clay and mud. [This was the epoch of a] *first revolution, which produced the establishment and differentiation of families, and which introduced a sort of property.*[9] Men in this state enjoyed a great deal of leisure, which they employed to furnish themselves with several kinds of commodities unknown to their

[5] [Ibid. *CW*, 3:43. Maistre's small capitals.]

[6] *Discours sur l'inégalité*, p. 101. [*CW*, 3:44. Maistre's small capitals.]

[7] Ibid., p. 102. [*CW*, 3:45.]

[8] Ibid., p. 103.

[9] Ibid., p. 105. [*CW*, 3:46.]

fathers, *and this was the first yoke ... and the first source of ... evils.*[10] They began to draw closer to each other. Man, who had coupled quite simply for centuries and who had found this quite good, decided to love. He was punished for this corruption by jealousy, and blood flowed.[11]

Happily, they began to sing and dance in front of their cabins and around the trees, but here was another misfortune: *the handsomest, the strongest, and the most adroit, or the most eloquent, became the most highly considered; and that was the first step towards inequality, and, at the same time, towards vice.*[12]

In this state, however, men lived *free, healthy, good, and happy insofar as they could be according to their Nature. ... But from the moment one man needed the help of another, as soon as they observed that it was useful for a single person to have provisions for two, equality,* already attacked by the aristocracy of singers, dancers, and the beautiful, *disappeared, and property was introduced.*[13]

This great revolution was produced by metallurgy and agriculture, which ... *ruined the human race.*[14]

Things having reached this point, it is easy to imagine the rest,[15] and the story is ended. In total, thirty pages to answer the first question, which he made the second.

This is followed by another work in which he treats the origin of government and the social pact.

He recapitulates however, and he assigns three distinct epochs to the progress of inequality: *the establishment of the Law and of the Right of property was,* he says, *the first stage* (page 165). However the aristocracy of beauty, of skill, etc. *was the first step towards inequality, and ... towards vice* (page 112), and the sharp stones, the huts of branches, etc. also brought about the *first revolution* producing the *first yoke* and was the *source of evils* that have since overwhelmed the human race (pages 105 and 108). From which it follows that inequality had three first stages, which is very curious.

The Second was the establishment of magistracy (page 165), or, if you prefer, metallurgy and agriculture (page 118). You may choose.

[10] Ibid., p. 108. [*CW*, 46.]
[11] Ibid., p. 111.
[12] Ibid., p. 112. [*CW*, 3:47.]
[13] Ibid., pp. 117–18. [*CW*, 3:49.]
[14] Ibid. [*CW*, 3:49.]
[15] Ibid., p. 126. [*CW*, 3:51.]

Thus, inequality had three first epochs and two second epochs. What an analysis! What profundity! What clarity!

What Rousseau should have taught us, at least approximately, is the duration of the first epoch, where men had laws, but not a magistracy, which only appeared in the second epoch.

The Third epoch is unique, but quite remarkable. *The third and last was the changing of legitimate power into arbitrary power* (p. 165).

Here Rousseau pushes distraction to the point of confusing the progress of the human species in general with the progress of particular nations. He considers the entire human species as a single nation, and he shows it raising itself successively from *animality* to the cabin, from the cabin to laws and property, from laws to metallurgy or magistracy and from legitimate government to despotism. From which it follows incontestably that the subjects of the antique sovereigns of Asia, those monarch-Gods whose wills were oracles, were much better governed than the Spartans or the Romans at the time of Cincinnatus, since they were nearer the origins of things; or that the Spartans and other republicans of later times did not have a legitimate government because they arrived after the third epoch.

When one refutes Rousseau, it is less a question of proving that he is wrong than proving that he does not know what he wants to prove, which is what happens especially in his discourse on the inequality of conditions.

Broadly speaking, he maintains that society is bad, and that man is not made for this state. But if you ask him what state he was made for then, he knows not what to reply, or he replies without understanding himself.

All things examined, he decides for the *beginnings of Society*. Then, he says, *the relations already established among men required in them qualities different from their primitive constitution; that morality beginning to be introduced into human Actions, and each man, prior to Laws, being sole judge and avenger of the offences he had received, the goodness suitable for the pure state of Nature was no longer that which suited nascent Society ... it was up to the terror of revenge to take the place of the restraint of Laws.*[16]

This state where men live gathered together but without laws[17] and

[16] [*Discours sur l'inégalité*. *CW*, 3:48.]

[17] Rousseau, who analyses nothing, confuses written law with law in general; this is why he imagines societies without laws. He also imagines laws prior to magistracy. These two ideas have the same worth. Does he believe that murder was never punished before there was a law against murder? And that the custom in

where *the terror of revenge took the place of the restraint of the Laws* is the best possible state, according to Rousseau.

The more one thinks about it, the more one finds that this state was the least subject to revolutions, the best for man, and that he must have come out of it only by some fatal accident,[18] *which, for the common utility,* OUGHT NEVER[19] *to have happened. The example of Savages, who have almost all have been found at this point, seems to confirm that the human Race was made to remain in it always;*[20] *that this state is the veritable youth of the World;*[21] *and that all subsequent progress has been in appearance so many steps towards the perfection of the individual, but in fact toward the decrepitude of the species.*[22]

Certainly, there is nothing reasonable in this piece; but at least it seems that the ideas are clear and that Rousseau is displaying a fixed system. Everywhere he speaks with favour of savages: in his opinion, *they are very well governed.*[23] It is from among them that he chooses all his examples; he insists on this great argument in more than one place. We see Europeans embrace the life of savages while we have never seen a savage embrace ours; this proves at most that it is easier to find a brute among men than a man among brutes. He tells the true or false story of a Hottentot raised in our religion and in our customs, and who, tired of all these abuses, *returned to his equals*. He engraved

virtue of which one punished a murderer by such and such a punishment was not a law, since custom is only the presumed will of the legislator? In the second place, the law being only the will of the legislator made active for the redress of wrongs, one can conceive of the law without the organ of the law, distinct from the legislator or confused with him. So that the idea of law is a relative idea in two ways, and so that it as impossible to think of it without magistrates as without a legislator.

[18] Accident!

[19] The accident that *OUGHT NEVER*!! – effectively it was quite wrong! *Nature OUGHT* to have made it stop to prevent it from *happening*.

[20] In familiar conversation we say: "*This man was made for this profession; it's too bad he did not follow it.*" Rousseau lays hold of this expression and carries into philosophic language, according to this custom. So what we have is an intelligent being *who was made* (by God apparently) for the life of savages and that *a fatal accident* has precipitated into civilization (against God apparently). This fatal accident *ought not* have happened; or God *ought to have* oppposed it; but no one does his duty.

[21] Rousseau here takes the *youth of a nation* for the *youth of the world*; this is the same foolishness that I pointed out above.

[22] *Discours sur l'inégalité*, p. 116. [*CW*, 3:48–9. Maistre's small capitals.]

[23] *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. v. [*CW*, 4:174.]

this history on the frontispiece of this work and in a note to which *there is not a word of rejoinder* he tells us to *see the Frontispiece*.[24]

So we could believe that Rousseau had clearly decided for the state of the savages, and nevertheless we would be mistaken. Two pages previously, he had refuted himself.

Every moral and sensitive man is revolted by the brutality and cruelty of these American savages whose happy existence Rousseau dares praise to us. Hordes of brutalized men wandering in the deserts almost without moral ideas and without knowledge of the divinity, having all the vices except those whose materials they lack, interminable and bloody wars, the Tomahawk, bloody scalpings, death chants, human flesh served at frightful meals, prisoners of war roasted, mangled, tormented in the most horrible way! Such frightful pictures. Rousseau feels it and here is how he meets the objection. *It is for want,* he says, *of having sufficiently distinguished between ideas and noticed how far these Peoples already were from the first state of Nature that many have hastened to conclude that man is naturally cruel, and that he needs Civilization in order to make him gentler.*[25]

The savage is therefore very *far from the first state of nature*. There are therefore several states of nature, which appears singular enough; but finally, which is the good one? For this must be decided. Rousseau replies, it is the primitive state, and *nothing is so gentle as man in his primitive state when,* [he is] *placed by Nature at equal distances from the stupidity of brutes and the fatal enlightenment of Civil man.*[26]

The state of the savage is therefore no longer a proportional mean between *animality* and civilization, and this proportional mean must be looked for between the state of animality and that of the savage. However, how is a man *much* less civilized than a savage nevertheless placed *at equal distances from the stupidity of brutes and the fatal enlightenment of Civil man,* of Newton, for example, or any other degraded being? How can such a state be at same time intermediate and *primitive*? In other words, how can the *first state of nature* be only the second? If the savage life is the *youth of the world,* and if *men were meant to remain in this state,* how did nature make men for a state where *vengeance became terrible, and men bloodthirsty and cruel,*[27]

[24] [*Discours sur l'inégalite, CW,* 3:93.]

[25] *Discours sur l'inégalité,* p. 114. [*CW,* 3:48.]

[26] Ibid., p. 114. [*CW,* 3:48.]

[27] Ibid., p. 113. [*CW,* 3:48.]

instead of designing him for the primitive state (which is the second) where *nothing is so gentle as man*?[28]

This is not all, however. Let us bring the two following passages together. Nothing is more provocative.

Savage peoples, he says, *already were [far] from the first state of nature ... [where man is] placed by Nature at equal distances from the stupidity of brutes, and the fatal enlightenment of Civil man* (p. 114).

In the beginnings of Society ... it was up to the terror of revenge to take the place of the restraint of the Law ... The example of the Savages, who have almost all been found at this point ... [shows us] the development of human faculties maintaining a golden mean between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our amour-propre (pp. 115 and 116).

Thus this happy intermediate state is found and is not found in the savage state. Almost all savage people are to be found at this point; but it is from lack of attention that *many* have not seen *how far these Peoples already were from the first state of nature.*

Once again, it is not a question of proving that Rousseau is wrong (for to be wrong one must affirm something) but of proving that he does not know what he wants to prove, that he has neither a plan nor a system, that he *worked in fits and starts*, as he said himself perhaps without believing it,[29] and that all his philosophical compositions are only pieced and tattered rags, often precious taken individually, but always detestable taken together. *Infelix operis summa quia ponere totem Nescit.*[30]

.....[31]

If there is a word that has been abused, that word is nature. It is often said that a good dictionary would avoid great quarrels. So let us see what meanings can be given to the word *nature.*

1. The idea of a supreme being is so natural to man, so rooted in his mind, so present in all his discourses, it is so easy to see in all the motive forces of the universe only the will of the great being, and [since] all these forces are in themselves only the effects of a superior

[28] Ibid., p. 114. [*CW*, 3:48.]

[29] [In his "Notice on the Notes" that he placed at the beginning of the *Discours*, Rousseau wrote: "I have added some notes to this work, following my lazy custom of working in fits and starts." *CW*, 3:16.]

[30] ["He is unhappy with the total result, because he cannot represent a whole figure." Horace *Art of Poetry* 34–5. Trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 1955. (Identification, Darcel ed.)]

[31] [Here Maistre's manuscript has three blank pages. (Darcel ed.)]

force, and of a primitive cause, nothing prevents us from calling them by the general name *nature*. It is in this sense that a Greek Father said that *nature is only divine action manifested in the world*.[32]

2. No theist philosopher, especially among the ancients, believed that the visible and invisible phenomena of the universe were the immediate effect of the divine will. Not everyone is truly aware of their own opinions of this subject, but if we look closely we will find that we are generally enough led to suppose the existence of some force that acted on the world in a secondary way.

Cudworth believed that it was an idea unworthy of divine majesty to make it intervene immediately in the generation of a fly[33] and this is what made him imagine his *plastic force*. It is not a question here of examining the value of this system; but one can say that it is almost general without knowing this, and that this learned Englishman only circumscribed and surrounded with arguments an idea that exists under different modifications in every head. We are almost invincibly led to believe in the existence of a secondary force that operates visibly and that we call *nature*. From this belief come those expressions so common in every language: "nature wants, does not want, permits, forbids, loves, hates, heals," etc. In a word, this expression is so necessary that it is not possible to do without it, and at every moment we tacitly assume the existence of this force.

When we say that *nature alone has closed a wound without the help of surgery*, if they ask us what we mean by this expression, what do we answer? Either we speak without understanding ourselves, or we have the idea of a *force*, of a *power*, of a *principle*, and, to speak clearly, of a *being* who works for the preservation of our body and whose action was sufficient to close the wound without the help of art.

[32] [St John] Chrysostom, cited in Grotius, *De Jure Belli et Pacis*, Bk. I, chap. v. [This would appear to be a faulty reference. According to Darcel, there is no such reference to Chrysostom in Grotius, though the concept involved can be found in both Grotius and Pufendorf. From his education in and practice of law, Maistre would have been quite familiar with these jurisconsults. (Darcel ed.)]

[33] [Ralph] Cudworth *Systema intellectuale*, Latin translation with the notes of Laurent Mosheim. In the preface, N° ... [Maistre was quite familiar with this work by the famous English Platonist. Published in 1678 with the title *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, it was later published in Latin as: *Radulphi Cudworthi ... Systema intellectuale huius universi, seu de veris naturae rerum originibus commentarii ... Joannes Laurentius Moshemius ... omnia ex anglico latine vertit ... variisque observationibus et dissertationibus auxit*. Maistre had the second Latin edition, "Leydon 1733," in his library. (Darcel ed.)]

However this force that acts in us acts as well in all the animals from the elephant to the mite, and in all the plants from the cedar to the moss. Because nothing is isolated in the world and nothing can exist as an independent force, either it is necessary that all these individual principles are related to a general cause that embraces everything and that uses them as pure instruments, or it is necessary that this great cause, this plastic nature, itself acts in all individuals in such a way that we regard particular forces as only the particular action of a general principle.

There is no other supposition to make. So, therefore, either God acts immediately in the universe, or he acts by the intermediary of an immaterial and single power that in its turn acts immediately or by the intermediary of certain principles that exist outside it.

Whatever the nature of these principles, it is certain that they execute the will of the infinite intelligence either indirectly or directly; thus in naming them we name it.

3. The totality of pieces that compose the whole must have a name, and commonly enough we give it that of *nature*, especially in speaking of the world we inhabit. It is in this sense that we say *that there are no two beings in nature that resemble each other perfectly*. By a completely natural analogy, we also give the name *nature* to the assemblage of parts or qualities that compose any whole, although this *whole* is itself only a part of the larger great whole.

Thus, we say *the nature of man, of horses, of elephants, of gold, of silver, of linden trees, of roses, of watches, of fire-engines.*

4. Finally, man being an agent whose action extends over everything he can reach, he has the power to modify a host of beings and to modify himself. Therefore, one needs a way of describing these beings before and after they have sustained human action. From this point of view, we generally oppose *nature* to *art* (which is human power) as we specifically oppose the wild plant to the grafted plant.

Therefore, one can understand by the word nature: 1. The divine action manifested in the universe. 2. Some cause acting under the direction of the first. 3. The totality of parts or qualities forming by their union a system of things or an individual being. 4. The state of a being capable of being modified by human action before it has undergone this modification.

After these preliminary explanations, we can reason on *the state of nature*, and if we have the misfortune of being mistaken, at least we will not have the misfortune of being misunderstood.

The state of nature, says Pufendorf, *is not the condition that Nature proposes to itself principally as the most perfect and most suitable to*

the human race;[34] and elsewhere, *The state of nature pure and simple ... is not the state to which nature has destined man.*[35]

Which is to say that the state of nature is against nature, or in other words, that nature does not want men to live in the state of nature.

The wording of this proposition is a little strange, but it is not surprising; it suffices to be understood. So what is this *pure and simple state of nature* that is against nature?

It is that where we conceive each person finding himself as he was born without all the inventions and all the purely human or divinely inspired establishments ... by which we understand not only the diverse sorts of arts with all the general commodities of life, but also civil societies whose formation is the principle source of the good order we see among men.[36] In a word, man in the state of nature *is a man fallen from the clouds.*[37]

Pufendorf is right; ordinary usage opposing the state of nature to the state of civilization, it is clear that man in the first state is only man, less all that he has from the institutions that surround him in the second state; which is say a man who is not a man.

I cite this distinguished jurisconsult, although he is no longer in fashion, because he expresses ideas that are in nearly all heads, and that it is only a question of developing.

Clearly, in the texts cited, the word *nature* cannot be taken in the third sense that I have given respecting usage, that is to say for *the whole of the pieces and forces constituting the system of the world*, for the whole is a work and not a worker. So one can only take the word *nature* in the first two senses insofar as it expresses an *action*, and in the fourth sense insofar as it expresses a *state*.

In effect, when one says that nature destines or does not destine a particular being to a particular state, the word *nature* necessarily awakens the idea of an intelligence and a will. When Pufendorf says that the state of nature is against nature, he is not contradicting himself: he only gives two different meanings to same word. In the first case, the word signifies a *state* and in the second a *cause*. In the first case, it is taken for the exclusion of art and civilization; and in the second, for the action of some agent.

Moreover, as in an equation one of the members can always be taken for the other, since they are equal, likewise the word *nature* every time

[34] *Droit de la nature et des gens*. Bk. I, chap. 2, § 1. Barbeyrac translation.
[35] Ibid., § 4.
[36] Ibid., § 1.
[37] Ibid. § 2.

that it expresses an *action* can only express that of the divine action, manifested immediately or by the intermediary of some secondary agent; it follows that without changing values, one can always substitute the value *God* for that of *nature*.

The proposition is thus reduced to this: *the state of nature is not a state to which God has destined man*. This is a very clear and most reasonable proposition.

There is no absurdity, said Cicero, *that has not been maintained* (he could have added *and no truth that has not been denied*) *by some philosopher*.

Once it pleased the Epicureans, then their disciple Lucretius, and in our time Rousseau, to maintain that man is not a social being. However Lucretius is much more moderate than Rousseau. The first contents himself with maintaining that, all things considered, the state of nature has no more drawbacks than that of association,[38] while the citizen of Geneva, who never stops on the road of error, maintains flatly that society is an abuse, and he has written a book to prove it.

Marcus Aurelius was not of this opinion when he said *that a being is social by the same token that it is reasonable*.[39] Rousseau, however, goes back to the source to dismiss the Emperor-Philosopher's sophism, and he wisely remarks that *the man who meditates is a depraved animal*.[40]

However, Rousseau makes a remarkable admission on the subject of inequality of conditions, that is to say, of society. *Religion*, he says, *commands us to believe that since God Himself took Men out of the state of Nature immediately after the creation, they are unequal because He wanted them to be so; but it does not forbid us to form conjectures, drawn solely from the nature of man and the Beings surrounding him, about what the human Race might have become if it had remained abandoned to itself*.[41]

[38] *Nor did mortal men much more then than now leave the sweet light of lapsing life*. Lucretius *On the Nature of Things* 5.986 [or 988?]. [As Darcel notes, these verses seem not to support Maistre's point, either by sense or context. (Darcel ed.)]

[39] Marcus Aurelius *Meditations* X.2.3

[40] *Discours sur l'inégalité*, p. 22. [*CW*, 3:23.] Elsewhere, he clearly opposes the *state of nature* to the *state of reasoning*. Ibid., p. 72. [*CW*, 3:37.]

[41] Ibid., p. 6. [*CW*, 3:19.] One can already observe in this passage Rousseau's capital fault considered as a philosopher. This is always to be using words without understanding them. For example, a being *abandoned to itself*, philosophically speaking, is an expression that means nothing.

This is to say that Rousseau's book is made *to know what might have become of the human race if there were no God, or if men had acted* WITHOUT HIS KNOWLEDGE?

Here, it must be admitted, is a very useful book! Voltaire, whose heart was worthless, but whose head was perfectly sane, did very well to reply to this book only with a joke.[42] The cold and exquisite[43] reason of this famous man had a horror of these inflated declamations, this eloquent *nonsense* a thousand times more unbearable than the innocent platitudes of men without pretensions.

Before examining if man is made or is not made for society, we cannot be dispensed from observing that this question, like all questions that can be raised about morality and politics, only make sense in the system of theism or spiritualism; that is to say in the system of a superior intelligence whose plans can be contradicted by the free agents of a lower order. In effect, if there is no original intention, and if all that exists is only the result of a chain of blind causes, everything is necessary; there is neither choice nor morality nor good nor evil.

Rousseau, who abused all words, abused the word *nature* to a disgusting degree. On every page of the discourse on inequality of conditions he uses it without defining it; he makes it mean anything he wants; he provokes common sense.[44]

However, it sometimes happens that he encounters truth by chance, but always without wanting to seize it. [Now] *without a serious study of man,* he says, *one will never succeed ... in separating, in the present constitution of things, what divine will has done from what human art has pretended to do.*[45]

[42] *"One acquires the desire to walk on all fours when one reads your work. Nevertheless, since I lost this habit more than sixty years ago,"* etc. [Translation from *CW*, 3:102.]

[43] [The adjective "exquisite" employed by Maistre to characterize Voltaire's intelligence seemed shocking or incomprehensible to the editor who suppressed it in the 1870 edition of Maistre's works. (Darcel ed.)]

[44] [The following paragraph is deleted in the manuscript: "The mania of the philosophers of this century is to separate men from the divinity. *Making abstraction,* they say, *of all religious ideas.* This is as if they said *in speaking of man let us make abstraction from man.* For man, who is an intelligent being, is a relation of the divinity; he is made by it and for it; he cannot be considered separate from his source." The passage was probably deleted here because it did not fit the context. Maistre will express the same idea in later works, especially the *St Petersburg Dialogues.* (Darcel ed.)]

[45] *Discours sur l'inégalité*, Preface, p. 69. [*CW*, 3:16.]

First, if human art had only *pretended* to do it, it has done nothing, and so God's work remains in its integrity; but let us not quibble over words with a man who uses them so poorly, and let us assume that he said what he wanted to say. So it is a question of distinguishing in man *what the divine will has done and what human art has done.*

But what is *human art*? *Nature* was not enough; here again is another power that Rousseau personifies in his anti-philosophic language and that he introduces onto the scene. If human art is not *perfectibility*, I do not know what Rousseau wanted to say.

The beaver, the bee, and other animals also deploy an *art* very well in the way they lodge and nourish themselves; so is it also necessary to write books to distinguish for each of these animals *what the divine will has done and what animal art has done*?

They will say, however, that the art of an animal is purely mechanical. It does today what it did yesterday; while the art of man is so variable in its conceptions that it is susceptible to more or less within a range of which it is impossible to assign the limits.

This is not the place to dispute the nature of animals. It is sufficient to observe that the *art* of the animal differs from that of man, that the latter is perfectible while the other is not.

Now, to simplify the question, let us imagine a single man on the earth who has lived as long as the whole human race, and who unites in himself all the faculties developed successively by all men. From the nature of things, he could not have been created an infant since he would not have been able to survive. So he possessed at birth all the strength of an adult man, and even some of our acquired knowledge; otherwise he would have died of hunger before he was able to discover the use of his mouth.

I assume, therefore, that this man, suffering from the unseasonable air, takes shelter in a cave; up to this point he is still a *natural man.* However, if finding the cave too small, he decides to extend it by weaving some branches supported by posts at the entrance; this is incontestably art. Then he ceases to be a *natural man.* Does this roof of foliage *pertain to the divine will or to human art*? Rousseau would probably have maintained that the man was already corrupted by this time.[46] Read the extravagant lines that begin the *Emile*: you will see there that *Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man. He forces one soil*

[46] "The first man who made himself clothing or a Dwelling, in so doing gave himself things that were hardly necessary, since he had done without them until then," etc. *Discours sur l'inégalité*, p. 27. [*CW*, 3:25.]

to nourish the products of another, one tree to bear the fruit of another ... He turns everything upside down; he disfigures everything; he loves deformity, monsters," etc.[47] Follow this reasoning, and you will see that it is an abuse to cook an egg. As soon as one opposes *human art* to *nature*, one does not know when to stop: it is perhaps as far from the cave to the cabin as from the cabin to the Corinthian column, and as everything is *artificial* in man in his quality as an intelligent and perfectible being, it follows that in denying him everything that comes from *art*, one denies him everything.

Burke said with a profundity that it is impossible to admire enough *that art is man's nature.*[48] Here is a great saying that contains more truth and wisdom than the works of twenty philosophers of my acquaintance.

It is no light undertaking, Rousseau says again, *to separate what is original from what is artificial in the present Nature of man, and to know correctly a state which no longer exists, which perhaps never existed.*[49]

This last supposition is the simple truth. And it must be admitted that nothing is more *difficult to know well than a state that never existed.* It is absurd to imagine that the Creator had given a being faculties that it must never develop, and still more absurd to assume that some being can give itself faculties or utilize faculties that it has received to establish an order of things contrary to the will of the Creator. The morality of human actions consists in what man can do for good or evil in the order in which he is placed, but not at all in his being able to change this order; for we sense well enough that all essences are invariable. Thus it depends on man to do good or evil in society, but not to be social or asociable.

Therefore, there has never been a *state of nature* in Rousseau's sense, because there has never been a time when there was no *human art.*[50] If one wants to call *state of nature* the state where the human race was

[47] [Translations from *Emile* are from Allan Bloom's edition (New York: Basic Books 1979), 37 (hereafter cited as Bloom).]

[48] [Maistre would have found this statement in Burke's *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791). Maistre used the same citation in his *On the Sovereignty of the People*; see p. 52 below.]

[49] *Discours sur l'inégalité*, Ibid., p. 58. [*CW*, 3:13.]

[50] [This awkward turn of phrase conforms to the manuscript. In the margin of the manuscript one finds the following correction, which is the reading adopted by the 1870 edition and by the *OC* (7:534): "Therefore there has never been a state of *nature* in Rousseau's sense, because there has never been a time when human art did not exist." (Darcel ed.)]

when human industry had made only a few small hesitant steps, well and good; it suffices to understand it this way. But it always remains demonstrated that in the progress of the human race towards perfection, progress that occurred by imperceptible nuances, it is impossible to draw a philosophic line separating one state from the other.

The animal finds everything that it needs at hand. It does not have the power to appropriate the beings that surround it and to modify them for its use. Man, on the contrary, finds under his hands for his enjoyment only raw materials and it is up to him to perfect them. Everything resists his animal power; everything bends to his intelligence. He writes his titles of grandeur on the three realms of nature, and the man who has received eyes to read them, is exalted to ecstasy.

So *human art* or perfectibility being the *nature* of man or the quality that constitutes him what he is by the will of the Creator, it follows that when one asks what in man pertains to the divine will and what pertains to human art, it is just as if one asked what in man comes from the divine will or from the nature that is his by the divine will.

But Rousseau, who represents *the state of nature* for us as that *where man did not reason*[51] and where he *remained abandoned to himself*,[52] where *not having among themselves any kind of moral relations or known duties, could be neither good nor evil*,[53] where *dispersed among the animals*[54] ... *scattered in the Woods, ... having neither fixed Domicile nor any need of one another ... without knowing knowing each other*;[55] where *violence and oppression were impossible*,[56] this Rousseau, I say, had begun by advancing that it was violence and oppression that put at an end to the state of nature. What he reels off above is so strange, that it is necessary to reread it twice to believe one's eyes.

Precisely what, then, says Rousseau, *is at issue in this Discourse? To indicate in the progress of things the moment when, Right taking the place of Violence, Nature was subjected to Law; to explain by what sequence of marvels the strong could resolve to serve the weak, and the People to buy a repose in ideas at the price of real felicity.*[57]

[51] *Discours sur l'inégalité*, p. 72 [?].

[52] Ibid., p. 6. [*CW*, 3:19.]

[53] Ibid., p. 63. [*CW*, 3:34.]

[54] Ibid., p. 44. [*CW*, 3:21.]

[55] Ibid., p. 84. [*CW*, 3:29.]

[56] Ibid., p. 88.

[57] Ibid, p. 3. [*CW*, 3:18.]

Then men were no longer *scattered*, although in the state of nature they were nevertheless united in society; but violence was introduced among them, and to extricate themselves from this state that was tiresome only for the *weak*, the *strong*, who were the masters, consented *to serve the weak and to submit nature to the law*. And the *people*, who were happy under the empire of violence, exchanged this *real* happiness for the *ideal* happiness the laws provide.

In recapitulating the different objects that Rousseau proposes for himself in his discourse on inequality, we find that he wrote his book to know:

1. What the human race would have become after its creation if there had not been a Creator.

2. To distinguish in the human constitution what comes from the divine will from what comes from the human will.

3. To form for himself just ideas and to give a perfect description of a state that never existed.

4. Finally (and this is PRECISELY what the question is about) to know *by what sequence of marvels,*[58] the violence that was impossible in the state of nature,[59] could force men to leave this state; and how *people* possessing *real felicity* under the empire of violence could resolve to abdicate it to enjoy the *repose of an idea* under the hard and insupportable reign of law.

Let none say that to ridicule Rousseau I have put something of mine into this short resume. *If these are not his express words, this is the sense of them.*

The best way to refute this so-called philosopher is to analyze him and translate him into philosophical language; then we are surprised we have ever been able to give him a moment's attention.

The source of his errors, in any case, was in the spirit of his century to which he paid tribute without perceiving it. What he had in particular was an excessive character that always led him to exaggerate his opinions. With other writers, error advances slowly and hides its approach; but with Rousseau it has no modesty. His foolish ideas of

[58] Ibid., p. 3. [*CW*, 3:18.]

[59] "I hear it always repeated that the stronger will oppress the weak. But let someone explain to me what is meant by this word *oppression*? ... This is precisely what I observe among us; but I do not see how that could be said of Savage men, to whom one would even have much trouble explaining what servitude and dominion are. ... How will he ever succeed in making himself obeyed? ... If someone chases me from one tree, I am at liberty to go to another." etc. *Discours sur l'inégalité*, p. 89. [*CW*, 3:41.]

independence and liberty led him to regret the condition of animals and to look for the true destination of man in the absence of all morality. He represents men in their NATURAL STATE, *forced, naked and without weapons, to defend their lives and their Prey against other wild Beasts.*[60]

In this state, *children remain bound to the father only so long as they need him for self-preservation. As soon as this need ceases, the natural bond dissolves. The children, exempt from the obedience they owed the father, and the father, exempt from the care he owed the children, all return equally to independence.*[61]

As for the union of the sexes, *his appetite satisfied, the man no longer needs a given woman, nor the woman a given man. The man has not the least concern, nor perhaps the least idea of the consequences of his action. One goes off in one direction, the other in another, and there is no likelihood that at the end of nine months they have any memory of having known each other: for this kind of memory, by which one individual gives preference to another for the act of procreation, requires ... more progress or corruption in human understanding than can be supposed in man in the state of animality in question here,"* etc.[62]

Every honest reader who has some idea of the dignity of his nature is at first revolted by these absurd depravities, but soon pity prevails over anger and he is content to say

happy in its time for a hundred good reasons,
would Geneva have been had it possessed little Houses!
and if a wise tutor had in this dwelling
by the advice of relatives locked him up early.[63]

[60] *Discours sur l'inégalité*, p. 14. [*CW*, 3:21.]

[61] *Contrat social*, Bk. I, chap. ii. [*CW*, 4:132.]

[62] *Discours*, note 10, p. 248. [*CW*, 3:89.]

[63] [Maistre has slightly altered a verse from Boileau by substituting Geneva for Macedonia. The original reads:

Heureux! si de son temps pour cent bonnes raisons,
La Macédoine eut eu des petites-Maisons,
Et qu'un sage Tuteur l'eut en cette demeure,
Par avis de Parens enfermé de bonne heure.
"Satire VIII"

The "Petites Maisons" was an insane asylum associated with the abbey of Saint-Germain des Prés in Paris; the asylum owed its name to the little "lodges" in which the demented were kept. Boileau, who was a pacifist, was expressing his view that Alexander the Great was a madman. See the Pléiade edition of the *Oeuvres complètes* (1966) of Boileau, 895n1 and 915n9.]

.....[64]

One can imagine only two ways of knowing man's destination: history and anatomy. The first shows what he has always been; the second shows how his organs correspond to his destination and certify it.

When a naturalist writes the natural history of an animal, he has no other torch to guide him than the facts. The scholars of the last century appear to have acted more philosophically than we think today when they based their politics on erudition. This method greatly displeased our modern speechifiers, and they have their reasons for finding it bad. It is a little easier to insult knowledge than to acquire it.

Rousseau reproaches Grotius because his practice is to *establish right by fact.* This, he says, is *his most persistent mode of reasoning. One could use a more consistent method, but not one more favorable to Tyrants.*[65]

We certainly have a right to be astonished at the extreme levity with which the ignorant of our time speak of these prodigies of knowledge who with incredible labour, in the last two centuries, opened the mines that today we exploit so easily. Undoubtedly one can abuse erudition, but the method of *establishing right by fact* is generally not so bad. To know the nature of man, the most direct and wisest way undoubtedly is to know what he has always been. Since when can theories be opposed to facts? History is experimental politics; this is the best or rather the only good politics. Rousseau treated politics like Buffon treated physics: the scholars [whom he disdained] treated it like Haller, or Spallanzani [treated physics].[66] Grotius has been reproached for

complètes (1966) of Boileau, 895n1 and 915n9.]

[64] [At this point, there are one page and a half blank pages in the manuscript. (Darcel ed.)]

[65] *Contrat social*, Bk. I, chap. 2. [*CW*, 4:132.]

[66] [This is Darcel's reading of a manuscript passage that is incoherent and even in contradiction with Maistre's intentions, given the context. The manuscript reads: "Rousseau a traité la Politique comme Buffon a traité la Physique: les Savans que nous dédaignons la traitèrent comme Haller, ou Spalanzani." From manuscript notes, it appears that the first editor, Charles de Maistre, consulted with a friend to try to decipher this perplexing passage. His reading, which appears in the 1870 first edition and in the *Oeuvres complètes* edition (7:540) is the following: "Rousseau a traité la politique comme Buffon la physique, et il est à l'égard des savants que nous dédaignons ce que le naturaliste français est aux Haller ou aux Spalanzani." As Darcel points out, this reading has the double drawback of abandoning the text and arriving at an evident contradiction by having Maistre disdain Haller and Spallanzani, naturalists we know he admired as defenders of the theory of the pre-

having established his systems on citations from poets; but to establish facts, poets are as good witnesses as other writers. The Abbé Mau rendered a real service to knowledge by compiling the different authorities that established the changes in temperature experienced by different climates since ancient times. Ovid, by describing the atrocious cold that he experienced in his exile, presented very striking objects of comparison, and he is as good to cite as a historian. In the second book of the *Iliad*, Homer described a sedition raised among the Greeks who were annoyed by the length of the siege. They ran to their ships and wanted to depart despite their chiefs. The wise Ulysses, inspired by Minerva, placed himself among the seditious and addressed them with these remarkable words, among others:

Too many chiefs do you harm; so a single man had the empire
Oh Greeks, you cannot be a people of kings:
The sceptre is to the one that it has pleased heaven to elect
To reign over the crowd and to give it laws.[67]

It is not altogether an indifferent thing for me to know what ancient good sense thought of sovereignty; and when I recall having read in St Paul that *all power comes from God*,[68] I like to read in Homer in almost the same terms, *that the dignity* (of the king) *comes from Jupiter who cherished him*.[69]

I like to hear that Delphic oracle rendered to the Lacedaemonians ready to receive the laws of Lycurgus, the oracle that Plutarch has transmitted to us according to the old Tyrtaeus, and who called kings *men divinely clothed in majesty*.[70]

French naturalist, was the author of a monumental 44-volume *Histoire naturelle*, in which he defended the "materialist" theory of spontaneous generation. Albrecht von Haller (1708–1777) was a Swiss scholar who, among other things, defended revelation against Voltaire. Lazzaro Spallanzani (1729–1799) was a remarkable Italian priest-scientist who carried out the first laboratory experiment on artificial insemination. (Darcel ed.)]

[67] *Iliad* 2.5.203. [I have given a literal translation of Maistre's French version of Homer's lines. A.T. Murray translates these lines as follows: "In no wise shall we Achaens all be kings here. No good thing is a multitude of lords; let there be one lord, one king, to whom the son of crooked-counselling Chronos hath vouchsafed the sceptre and judgments, that he may take counsel for his people." (Loeb Classical Library 1954).]

[68] [Romans 13:1]

[69] "For their honour is from Zeus, and Zeus, god of counsel, loveth him." Homer *Iliad* 2.197. [Loeb.]

[70] Plutarch *Lycurgus* [6.10]. This is not too much, I think, to render *theotimētos*. *To the Greeks the Muse gave native wit.* [Horace *The Art of Poetry* 323, Loeb.]

I admit my weakness; these texts, although taken from the poets, interest me more and give me more to think about than the whole *Social Contract*.

We must be grateful to writers who teach us what men have done and thought in all ages. The imaginary man of the philosophes is foreign to the statesman who works only with what exists.

Now if we ask history what man is, history tells that man is a social being who has always been observed in society. We are easily dispensed, I think, from occupying ourselves with some savage and isolated men found in the woods and living in the manner of beasts. These stories, if they are true, are anomalies so rare that they must be set aside in the examination of the question that occupies us here. It would be too unreasonable to look for the general nature of the species in the accidents of the individual. Moreover it must be noted that they have no right to say to us *Prove that man has always lived in society*, for we will reply *Prove to us that he has lived otherwise*, and in this case to retort is to reply, because we have on our side not only the actual state of man, but his state in all centuries as attested by the incontestable memorials of every nation.

The philosophes and Rousseau especially talk a lot about the *first men*; but it is necessary to understand these vague expressions that provide no specific idea. Let us fix the number of them, ten thousand, for example. Let us even place them some place, in Asia for example, to consider them at our leisure. These men that we now see so clearly, from where did they come? Did they descend from one or from several couples?

We can invoke here a general principle, which the illustrious Newton made one of the bases of his philosophy: *this is that one must not admit more causes in philosophy than is necessary to explain the phenomena of nature.*[71] In effect, as Pemberton put it very well in explaining this principle: *When a small number of means suffice to produce an effect, it is not necessary to put more at work. The thing is very clear; for if one were given the license to multiply physical causes without necessity, all our philosophic researches would lead to a pure Pyrrhonism, since the sole proof that we can have of the existence of a cause is its necessity to produce known effects. Thus, when one cause suffices, it is a waste of time to imagine another, since*

[71] Newton, *Eléments de la philosophie* (1753), Introduction, p. 29. [Maistre's reference would be to Henry Pemberton, *Elémens de la Philosophie Newtonienne*, French translation (Amsterdam and Leipzig 1755) of *A View of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy* (London 1728). (Darcel ed.)]

this other cause being annihilated, the effect would exist no less because of this.[72]

Linnaeus applies this incontestable maxim to the object that occupies us in this chapter: *a long succession of centuries having been able to produce by accidental causes all the varieties that we see of each different animal species, we can in consequence admit as an axiom that there was in the beginning one single couple for each species of animal that multiplies by means of two sexes.*[73]

Thus reason speaks as loudly as Revelation to establish that the human race descends from a single couple. But this couple, having never been in a state of infancy and having enjoyed from the moment of its creation all the forces of our nature, must necessarily have been clothed from the same moment with all the knowledge necessary for its preservation. Moreover, as man was surrounded by animals stronger than him, and since he was alone, he must necessarily have been clothed with a force, a power, proportional to his needs. Finally, all created intelligence having natural relations with the creating intelligence, the first man must have had very extensive knowledge about his nature, his duties, and his destination, and this supposes much else, for there is no partial barbarism. This brings us to a very important consideration, which is that the intelligent being can only lose his primitive knowledge by events of an extraordinary order that human reason reduced to its own competence can only suspect. Rousseau and so many others deserve pity for unceasingly confusing primitive man with savage man, whereas these two beings are precisely the two extremes of which the *barbarian* is the proportional mean.[74] Mysteries surround us everywhere; perhaps if we knew what a savage is and why there are savages, we would know everything. What is sure is that the savage is necessarily posterior to civilized man.

[72] [Blank reference in the manuscript, but see note 71. (Darcel ed.)]

[73] Linnaeus, cited in the *l'Esprit des journaux*, May 1794, p. 11. [The reference is to the *Esprit des Journaux, François et Etrangers*. The issue cited contained a review of volume 3 of the *Asiatic Researches*. The review begins by reporting research by Sir William Jones on the birthplace of humanity and includes a reference to the axiom of Linneaus. (Darcel ed.)]

[74] [The phrase "of which the barbarian is a proportional mean" was omitted in the 1870 edition (*OC*, 7:544); apparently the editor tried to soften the contradiction with Maistre's later statement that "The barbarian is a proportional mean between the savage and the citizen." (See below.) (Darcel. ed.)]

Let us examine the example of America. This country bears all the characteristics of a new land.[75] Moreover, as civilization in the old world dates from antiquity, it follows that the savages that inhabited America at the time of its discovery, descend from civilized men. It is necessary to admit this proposition or to maintain that they were savages, father to son, since the creation, which would be extravagant.

When one considers a particular nation, one sees it rises from some state of rudeness towards the last stage of civilization and from this observation superficial observers have concluded that savage life is the first state of man or to use their senseless term the *state of nature*. There are only two enormous errors in this assertion. In the first place, as I have just observed, the development of this or that nation does not represent that of the human race. Second, nations are *barbarian* in their infancy but not *savage*.[76] The barbarian is a proportional mean between the savage and the citizen.[77] He already possesses no end of knowledge: he has habitations, some agriculture, domestic animals, laws, a cult, regular tribunals; he lacks only the sciences. The simple life is not the savage life. There exists in the world a unique memorial and one of the most precious of its genre, to consider it only as a historical book; this is the book of Genesis. It would be impossible to imagine a more natural picture of the infancy of the world. After this book comes the Odyssey, *longo sed proximus intervallo*.[78] The first monument presents no trace of savage life, and in the second even, which is much later, one will find simplicity, barbarism, and ferocity,

[75] [A deleted marginal addition in Maistre's manuscript reads: "and animal nature there was and is visibly degraded." In *On the Sovereignty of the People*, Maistre refers to Cornelius de Pauw, "the ingenius author of *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains*" (See p. 136 below). The marginal note confirms the extent to which Maistre took his information about America from Pauw and to which he was tempted by Pauw's thesis that climate explained the decrepit state of animal and human nature in the New World. In his later works (especially in the *St Petersburg Dialogues*) Maistre will offer a moral (some great but unknowable sin on the part of an ancestor) rather than a genetic explanation for the brutality of savages. (Darcel ed.)]

[76] [The passage "as I have just observed, the development of this or that nation does not represent that of the human race. Second," appears in the margin of Maistre's manuscript. The 1870 edition omits this passage, which produces an incoherent reading: "In the first place, nations are *barbarian* in their infancy but not *savage*" (*OC*, 7:545). (Darcel ed.)]

[77] [See note 74 above.]

[78] ["but next by a long distance."] Virgil *Aeneid* 5.320. [Trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 1940.]

but not the degradation of the savage. This state has been observed only in the Americas; at least there is no proof it existed elsewhere.[79] The Greeks also spoke to us of the *first men*, but the Greeks, who were children as the Egyptian priest said very well in the *Timaeus*,[80] knew only themselves, thought only of themselves, and saw the universe in Greece. If a Phoenician had come to teach them to read, they would have immediately have made him the inventor of writing, and for them the first men were the first inhabitants of Greece. Today our philosophes go looking for primitive man in the deserts of America that we have known since yesterday; it is the same folly. It is a remarkable thing that the genealogies of all their royal houses go back to a God. There is not a man belonging to the great families of Greece who could not say: *Heaven, all the universe is full of my ancestors*.[81] Therefore, far from religious and historical traditions leading men back to the state of brutes, they are all in agreement in recalling for them a primitive state where the gods were directly involved in the government of the human race. It is a universal prejudice spread around the world, a prejudice belonging to all times and all places, that the human race is always corrupting itself: *il mondo invecchia*, Tasso said, *e invecchiando intristisce*.[82] All centuries have said the same thing. Several writers have mocked this prejudice, and in one sense they are right. Yet every general prejudice has a true root, and once again, neither history nor fable, much truer than history, anywhere leads back to the savage state. It is philosophy that has told us this story, and no one ought to believe it.[83] The Greeks told us of a time when agriculture was unknown to their ancestors, when they lived from the spontaneous fruits of the earth. They said that they owed this discovery to the hand of divinity. One can think what one wishes about the

[79] [Curiously, Maistre here seems to exempt from the status of "degraded savages" other primitive peoples known to eighteenth-century Europeans such as Africans, Australian aboriginals, and the inhabitants of New Caledonia (known through Cook's discoveries). In his later remarks on the same topic in the *St Petersburg Dialogues*, Maistre did not limit his denigration of "savages" to the aboriginal peoples of the Americas. (Darcel ed.)]

[80] [Plato *Timaeus* 10.22 b–C. (Darcel ed.)]

[81] [Racine, *Phèdre*, Act IV, scene 6, verse 1276. (Darcel ed.)]

[82] [Tasso, *Aminta*, Act II, scene 2, verses 881–2. Translation: "the world ages and in aging is corrupted." (Darcel ed.)]

[83] [This long passage on the Greeks, beginning with the words "The Greeks also spoke ..." is omitted in the 1870 edition (*OC*, 7:545). In the manuscript it is marked with a single penstroke in a different-coloured ink from that used by Joseph de Maistre. (Darcel ed.)]

agricultural epoch among the ancient Greeks. If perfect civilization requires agriculture, society in the strict sense can do without it. Moreover, do we not know that the Greeks were children, as the Egyptian priest said very well in the *Timaeus*? Without the least knowledge of antiquity, they related everything to themselves; they saw only themselves, and if a Phoenician had come to teach them to read they would immediately have made him the inventor of writing.[84]

So if there were real savages among the Greeks, they were so young that we could conclude nothing from them about the primitive state of man.

Let us consult the Egyptians, so ancient and so celebrated; what do they tell us? That Egypt, after having been governed by the first eight gods for a period of time whose beginning it is impossible to fix, fell to the power of twelve succeeding gods some eighteen centuries before our era; that gods of the third order reigned during the subsequent 2,000 years; that the first man-king ascended the throne, as everyone knows,[85] in the year 12356, that up to Moeris there were 330 kings whose names we do not know except that they reigned for 10,000 years.

If from the Egyptians we pass to the Orientals, much older than them as is demonstrated by a simple inspection of the terrain of Egypt, we will again find myriads of centuries and always the reign of gods proceeding that of men. Everywhere we find theophanies, divine incarnations, and alliances of heroes and gods, but no trace of this claimed state of *animality* from which some philosophes would have us born. Now we must never forget that popular traditions, and especially general traditions, are necessarily true in one sense, that is to say that they admit of alteration, exaggeration, and other ingredients of human weakness, but their general character is inalterable and necessarily founded on the truth. In effect, a tradition whose object is not a particular fact cannot begin against the truth; there is no means to make this hypothesis. If ancient peoples had lived for centuries in the state of brutes, never could they have imagined the reign of gods and divine communications; on the contrary, they would have embroidered the theme of this primitive state, and poets would have

[84] [The repetition evident in the last two sentences is an obvious result of the fact that Maistre never edited his manuscript for publication.]

[85] [Darcel suggests that by the phrase "as everyone knows," Maistre was deliberately echoing Voltaire, who used it for comic effect in tales like *Zadig*, and that Maistre was intimating that tales of Eygptian antiquity were not to be taken seriously. (Darcel ed.)]

painted for us men with fur and claws grazing in the forest and not even knowing how to speak. In effect, this is what the Greek and Latin poets have told us, because the Greeks having had not savage but barbarian ancestors, they embroidered on this state of barbarism, as did the Latin poets, their copyists. However, they knew nothing of antiquity, and above all they were incredibly ignorant of ancient languages. This is what obliged their wise men to travel and to go to the banks of the Nile and the Ganges to question men much older than themselves.

The more one consults history and antique traditions, the more one will be convinced that savage man is a veritable anomaly, an exception to the general rules, that he is posterior to the social state, that if he existed more than once he is at least very rare in the long run, that he exists incontestably only in America, and that instead of looking for how the savage is able to elevate himself from his state of brutality to civilization, that is to say how a bent plant can straighten itself, it would be better to ask the contrary question.

In North America an inscription and antique figures have been found that Court de Gebelin has explained in a laughable way in his *Monde primitif*.[86] In the same country, even further north, traces have been found of regular fortifications. Were the creators of these monuments ancestors of modern Americans or not? In the first hypothesis, how were these people brutalized on their own soil? In the second, how were they brutalized elsewhere and how did they come and substitute themselves for a civilized people who were made to disappear or who had disappeared before the arrival of these new inhabitants? These are interesting questions, apt to exercise all the wisdom of the human mind. Undoubtedly, no one has the right to require clear solutions. Alas, we have been observing for so short a time, we know so little about the real history of men, that we can scarcely require of the best minds any more than somewhat plausible conjectures. But what provokes impatience is seeing men who pass by these great mysteries without perceiving them, who come with a high and apocalyptic tone to report to us in the style of the initiate what all children know and what all men have forgotten, who go looking for the history of primitive man in some particular and modern facts, leafing through some of yesterday's travel accounts, pulling the true and false from them, and pompously telling us:

[86] [Antoine Court de Gebelin, *Le Monde Primitif analysé et comparé avec le monde actuel le monde moderne*, 9 vols. (Paris 1771–82).]

O Man, whatever Country you may come from, whatever your opinion may be, listen: here is your history, such as I believed it to read,[87] *not in the Books of your Fellow-men, who are liars, but in Nature, which never lies.*[88]

Would one not say that Rousseau is not a *fellow man* of his readers, that his discourse is not a *book*, that he alone of all the men who have existed could read *in nature*, and that this old nurse has told him all her secrets? In truth, one cannot conceive how such trickery obtained a moment's attention.

Wherever man has been able to observe man, he has always found him in society; this state is therefore for him *the state of nature*. It matters little that this state is more or less perfected among the different human families, it is always society. Even savages are not an exception, first, because they also live in society, and second, because they are only a degradation of the species, a branch separated we do not know how from the great social tree.

The anatomy of man, of his physical and moral faculties, would demonstrate this if there were something lacking in what history furnishes us. Everything that surrounds him submits to his hand, but the dominion that he exercises over the earth depends on society. Alone he can do nothing and his strength, like that of the poles of an artificial magnet, exists only in union.[89] All animals, at least those with which he can have relations, must serve him, nourish him, amuse him, or disappear. The most refractory substances of the mineral realm cede to his powerful action. In the vegetable and animal realms, his empire is still more striking. Not only does he subject to himself a host of species of these two orders, he modifies them, he perfects them, he makes them more appropriate for his nourishment or his pleasures, and this is what Rousseau calls *monsters*. The universal agent, fire, is at his command;[90] urged by his labours, the earth furnishes him with a multitude of productions. It nourishes the other animals, but obeys him alone. The universal agent, fire, is at his orders and belongs only to

[87] This is about the only word we can accept in the *Discours sur l'inégalité*.

[88] [*Discours sur l'inégalité*. *CW*, 3:19.]

[89] [The passage beginning "but the dominion" and ending "exists only in union" is omitted in the 1870 edition (*OC*, 7:550). Since the magnet analogy is repeated in the following paragraph, it appears that the editor was correcting an obvious fault in the manuscript. (Darcel ed.)]

[90] [The passage "and this is what Rousseau calls *monsters*. The universal agent, fire, is at his command" is also omitted in the 1870 edition (*OC*, 7:550); since the reference to fire is repeated one sentence later, this is another obvious editorial improvement. (Darcel ed.)]

him. All known substances are united, divided, hardened, softened, melted, and atomized by its powerful action. Water and fire combined by man's art obtain for him incalculable forces. Admirable instruments transport him to the midst of the celestial spheres; he counts them, he measures them, he weighs them, he divines what he cannot see. He dares more than he can do, but even when his instruments and his very organs abandon him, his methods are no less just, the exactitude is in his thought, and often he is greater by his attempts than by his successes.

His daring excursions into the moral world are no less admirable, but his arts, his sciences, and the dominion he exercises over the earth belong absolutely to the social state. Similar to the poles of an artificial magnet, men are strong only through union. Isolated they can do nothing, and this is the incontestable proof that the social state is *natural*, for it is not permitted to suppose that God, or nature if one wants to speak ordinary language, had given man faculties that he must not develop. This metaphysical contradiction will not enter a sane head. I have shown, says Rousseau, *that perfectibility, social virtues, and the other faculties that Natural man had received in potentiality could never develop by themselves, that in order to develop they needed the chance combination of several foreign causes which might never have arisen and without which he would have remained eternally in his primitive constitution.*

This is to say that God gave man faculties that had to remain in *potentiality*, but that *chance* events which *might never have arisen* brought them into existence. I doubt that anyone has ever uttered such a foolish thing. Since the one who said it no longer exists, nothing prevents us from calling things by their proper name.

It is very inappropriate that perfectibility is here put on the same level as particular faculties, with *social virtues and the other human faculties*. Perfectibility is not a particular human quality; it is, if we may put it this way, the quality of all these qualities. There is not in man a single power that is not susceptible of perfection. He is all perfectible, and to say that this quality could remain potential, is to say that, not only in the individual being, but in the entire class of beings, the essence could remain potential. Once again, it is impossible to qualify this assertion.

It is easy to trace the anatomy of this error and to show how it occurred. Rousseau saw only the surface of everything, and as he examined nothing in depth, his expression shows this. We can observe that in all his works he takes all abstract words in their popular sense. He speaks, for example, of *chance events* that might not have happened; he has to leave generalizations and make particular supposi-

tions. He sees two isolated savages who are walking by themselves and who happen to meet each other and take a notion to live together. He says that they met each other *by chance*. Seeing a seed detached from a shrub fall to the earth ready to nourish it, seeing another savage who perceives the fall of the seed and the germination that follows, thus receiving his first lesson in agriculture, he says that seed fell *by chance* and that the savage saw it *by chance*. Since it is not necessary that such a man meet another and that such seed fall, he calls these events *chance events that need never have arisen*. In all this, his governess would have spoken just like him. Without examining what can be said and to what point one can say that what happened could not have happened, it is at least certain that the general plans of the Creator are invariable, and that in consequence if man is made for society, a particular savage might well not have met another; but it is generally necessary that savages meet[91] and become men. If man is made for agriculture, it might well have happened that a particular seed did not fall on a particular piece of ground, but it could not have happened that agriculture not be discovered in this way or some other.

So human faculties prove that man is made for society, because a creature cannot have received faculties in order not to use them. Moreover, man being an active and perfectible being and his action only being exercised on the beings that surround him, it follows that these beings are not themselves what they must be, because these beings are co-ordinated with the existence and attributes of man, and that the one being can only act on the other to modify it. If the substances around man were refractory, his perfectibility would be a vain quality since it would have neither objects nor materials. Therefore the ox is *made* to work, the horse to be bridled, marble to be cut, the wild vine to be grafted, etc. Therefore, *art is the nature of man*, and the order that we see is the *natural* order.

Speech alone, moreover, would prove that man is a social being by essence. I will not permit myself any reflections on the origins of speech; enough children have chattered on this subject without me coming to add another voice. It is impossible to explain the origin of language and its diversity by our small means. Languages could not have been invented either by one man, who would not have been able to make himself obeyed, nor by several, who would not have been able to agree among themselves. Speech cannot convey the nature of the

[91] I am reasoning according to Rousseau's hypothesis, and without claiming to give to society such a false origin.

Word.[92] Let us limit ourselves to saying about this faculty what has been said of the one who calls himself the WORD: *Who can tell his origin?*

I will only observe that people commonly enough commit the same sophism with respect to the origin of languages as they do with respect to the origin of civilization. They examine the origin of one language instead of going back to the origin of language itself, just as they reason about the civilization of one human family thinking that they are speaking of that of the human race. If the language of a savage horde were only thirty words, would it be permissible to conclude that there was a time when these men did not speak and that these thirty words are *invented*? Not at all, for these words would be a *remembrance* and not an *invention*, and it would be a question of knowing, on the contrary, how this horde, necessarily descending from one of the civilized nations that have inhabited the globe, how, I say, it is possible that the language of this nation has been thus reduced and metamorphosed to the point of being no more than a poor and barbarous jargon. This is the same question in other terms as the one that was proposed above about savages, for language is only a portrait of man, a kind of parhelion that repeats the star as it is.

In any case, I am far from believing that the languages of savages are as poor as people have imagined. The travellers who have learned them have transmitted to us discourses given by these savages that give us a good enough idea of the richness and energy of their languages.

Everyone knows this response that a savage gave to a European who advised him and his tribe to change their habitation. "How can you want us to do this," the Savage said to him, "if we could decide to depart, would we say to the bones of our ancestors, *get up and follow us?*" Certainly, this good man's dictionary must have had a certain scope. Take a Patagonian, a Pecheranian, an Albino,[93] and without departing from their relations with physical beings, we would be astonished by the prodigious number of ideas and in consequence of

[92] ["La Parole ne sauroit exprimer ce que c'est que la Parole." Maistre's play on the word "parole," which in French also means "speech," seems impossible to capture in translation.]

[93] [These references reveal the limits of the ethnographic knowledge of both Joseph de Maistre and the eighteenth century. "Péchiniens" are mentioned in the *Encyclopédie* as a people of Ethiopia who "according to all appearances, are Homer's pygmies." Jaucourt, in the *Encyclopédie*, in an article on "white negroes," says that "one finds a large enough number of these *white negroes* in the realm of Loango; the inhabitants of this country call them *dondos*, and the Portuguese *albinos*." (Darcel ed.)]

words that they must possess. Horace dining in the eloquent circle of Maecenas could have spoken at his ease of the first men as *dumb, shapeless beasts*;[94] but these mute men never existed except in the imagination of poets. Speech is as essential to man as flight is to birds. To say that there was a time when speech was *in potential* in the human race is to say that there was a time when the art of flying was *in potential* in volant species. It is absolutely the same thing. As soon as the wing is formed, the bird flies; as soon as the glottis and the other organs of speech are formed, man speaks. While he is learning the organ is unformed, but it is perfected with thought, and it always expresses all that it can express. Thus, properly speaking, even in infancy the organ does not remain *in potential*; for as soon as it is formed and even while it is being formed it passes to the act. Under the empire of an intelligent first cause we do not know what a faculty could be that *could* fail to develop; nor do we know what an inorganic organ is.

However if man is made to speak, it is to speak to someone apparently, and this truly celestial faculty being the bond of society, the organ of all human enterprises, and the means of his power, it proves that he is social, just as it proves that he is reasonable, speech being only exterior reason, or manifest reason.

So let us always conclude like Marcus Aurelius: *man is social, because he is reasonable*; let us also add: *but he is corrupt in his essence, and in consequence he must have a government.*

[94] Horace *Satires I* 3.100.

CHAPTER TWO

Man Born Evil in a Part of His Essence

Man is an enigma whose knot has not ceased to occupy observers. The contradictions that he contains astonish reason and impose silence on it. So what is this inconceivable being who carries within him powers that clash and who is obliged to hate himself in order to esteem himself?

All the beings that surround us have only one law and follow it in peace. Man alone has two laws, and both of them attracting him at the same time in contrary senses, he experiences an inexplicable tearing. He has a moral end towards which he feels himself obliged to proceed, he has a feeling of his duties and the consciousness of virtue; but an enemy force entices him and, blushing, he follows it.

All observers agree about this corruption of human nature, and Ovid speaks like St Paul:

I see the better and I approve it, but I follow the worse.[1]
My God! What a cruel war
I sense two men within me.[2]

Xenophon too, speaking through one of the personages of the *Cyropaedia*, cried out: *Ah, I now know myself and I painfully experience that I have two souls, one that carries me to the good and the other than entices me towards the evil.*[3]

[1] Ovid *Metamorphoses* 6.20. [Trans. Frank Justus Miller, Loeb Classical Library 1966.]

[2] Racine, after St Paul. [Jean Racine, *Cantiques spirituels*, Cantique III, after Romans 7:14–16.]

[3] Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 6.1.41. [Walter Miller translates these lines as: "it is obvious there are two souls, and when the good one prevails, what is right is done; but when the bad one gains the ascendency, what is wrong is attempted." Loeb Classical Library 1961.]

Epictetus warns the man who wants to advance towards perfection to distrust himself *like an enemy and a traitor.*[4]

And the most excellent moralist who ever wrote would not have been wrong to say that *the great goal of all our efforts must be to render ourselves stronger than ourselves.*

On this point Rousseau cannot contradict the universal conscience. *Men are wicked,* he says, *sad and continual experience spares the need for proof.*[5] *However,* he adds immediately, with a tranquil pride that makes us burst out laughing: *MAN is naturally good; I believe I have demonstrated it.*[6]

As this demonstration is a little watered down in Rousseau's different works, it is good to strip it of its surroundings and present it to the reader reduced to its most simple expression.

Man is naturally good, if his vices do not derive from his nature. Moreover, all the vices of man come from society, which is against nature: therefore man is naturally good.

You can leaf through Rousseau as much as you like and you will find nothing more on this question; it is on this pile of sand that the great edifices of the *Discourse on Inequality*, *Emile*, and even part of the *Social Contract* rest.

His developments of this syllogism are admirable. For example, if you find that adultery disturbs society a bit, Rousseau will immediately reply to you: *Why do you marry?* Someone takes your wife because you have one; this is your fault; what are you complaining about? In the state of nature, which is good, they did not marry, they coupled. *His appetite satisfied, the man no longer needs a given woman, nor the woman a given man. ... One goes off in one direction, the other in another ... this kind of memory, by which one individual gives preference to another for the act of procreation, requires ... more progress or corruption in human understanding, than can be supposed in man in the state of animality.*[7]

If the spectacle of an unnatural son revolts you, this is again the fault of society, for in the state of nature, children are only linked to their father as long as they need them to preserve themselves; as soon as the need ceases, the natural bond is dissolved; the child is exempt from obedience as the father is exempt from care.[8]

[4] Epictetus *Encheiridion* 72. [Chapter 76 in modern editions. (Darcel ed.)]

[5] *Discours sur l'inégalité*, p. 205, note 7. [*CW*, 3:74.]

[6] Ibid. Observe this metaphysical finesse. *Men* are evil but *man* is good. *Man!* So deal only with *man*, and beware of *men.*

[7] *Discours sur l'inégalité*, note 10, no. 4. [*CW*, 3:89.]

[8] *Contrat social*, Bk. I, chap. 2. [*CW*, 4:132.]

Do thieves displease you? Reflect that it is property that makes thieves and that property is directly against nature, that according to the wise Locke's axiom very well applied *where there is no property, there is no injury*,[9] and that the *wars, murders, miseries, crimes and horrors* of all kinds that overwhelm the human race are the work of the first audacious man who having enclosed a piece of ground decided to say this is mine.[10]

Tyranny and all the evils that it produces have no other source. In effect, *what can be the chains of dependence among men who possess nothing? If someone drives me from one tree, I am at liberty to go to another; if someone torments me in one place, who will prevent me from going elsewhere? Is there a man whose strength is sufficiently superior to mine ... to force me to me to provide for his subsistence while he remains idle; ... should his vigilance relax for a moment ... my chains are broken, and he never in his life sees me again*,[11] and the tyrant becomes good again.

Thus, the proof that man is naturally good is that he abstains from all the evil that he is able to commit.

Elsewhere however, Rousseau is more reasonable. *In meditating*, he says, *on the nature of man, I believed I discovered*[12] *in it two distinct principles*[13] (the one good and the other evil). ... *In sensing myself carried away and caught up in the combat of these two contrary motions, I said to myself, "No, man is not one. I want and I do not want; I sense myself enslaved and free at the same time. I see the good, I love it, and I do the bad."*[14]

I will not examine the pitiful conclusion that Rousseau draws from this observation; it would only prove that he never saw anything but the surface of objects, but I will not write on metaphysics.

In any case, it is really too bad that Rousseau *discovered* the evil principle that is in man; without him Socrates would have had the priority. One of

[9] *Discours sur l'inégalité*, p. 114. [*CW*, 3:48.]

[10] Ibid., p. 95. [*CW*, 3:43.]

[11] Ibid., pp. 90–1. [*CW*, 3:41.]

[12] [Maistre struck out the following note that appears in the margin of his manuscript: "*In meditating on the nature of man, I believed I discovered!* Pride is quite amusing when it delivers to us with the apparatus of a discovery a banal idea that is the basis of all good books on morality both ancient and modern." (Darcel ed.)]

[13] [Again, struck out from the manuscript is the following passage from the Rousseau citation: "*one of which raised him to the study of the eternal truths, to the love of justice and moral beauty, to the regions of the intellectual world whose contemplation is the wise man's delight ...*" (Darcel ed.)]

[14] *Emile*, Bk. 4. [Pléiade, 4:583. This citation is from the Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar. Bloom, 278.]

his most illustrious disciples transmitted to us the ideas of his master on this astonishing contradiction that is in man. *Nature*, said Socrates, *united in this being* the principles of sociability and of dissension: for on one side, we see that men need to help one another, that they feel pity for the unfortunate, that they have a natural inclination to help each other in their mutual needs; and that they are thankful for the services they receive. But on the other side, if the same object inflames the desires of several, they battle each other for its possession and try to supplant each other. Anger and contestations produce enmity, covetousness stifles benevolence, and envy gives birth to hate.[15]

But if one of the principles *discovered* in *Emile took him basely into himself, subjected him to the empire of the senses and to the passions which are their ministers*,[16] of what use is the one *which raised him to the study of eternal truths, to the love of justice and moral beauty, and to the regions of the intellectual world whose contemplation is the wise man's delight*?[17] Since man is composed of one principle that *counsels* the good, and another that *does* evil, how can such a being live with his fellows? Hobbes was perfectly right, provided that one does not give too great extension to his principles; society is really a state of war.[18] We find here the necessity for government. Since man is evil he must be governed; it is necessary that *when several want the same thing* a power superior to the claimants judges the matter and prevents them from fighting. Therefore a sovereign and laws are needed; and even under their empire is not society still a *potential* field of battle? And is the action of magistrates anything but a pacifying and permanent power that interposes itself without respite between the citizens to prohibit violence, command peace, and punish the violators of the Truce

[15] Xenophon *Apologia Socratis* 2.6 [or 21? (Darcel ed.)] *Daily in our theaters one sees, moved and crying for the troubles of an unfortunate person, a man who, if he were in the Tyrant's place, would aggravate his enemy's torments even more.* (Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, p. 71.) [*CW*, 3:36.] One could employ lighter colours and say *such a man could hiss the most beautiful lines in the piece if the author were his enemy.* This is always the same observation under different forms.

[16] [Bk. 4, Bloom, 278.]

[17] Ibid. The school of Zeno, *in meditating on the nature of man, discovered* that it is vitiated and that to live in a manner conforming to his destination man has need of a *purifying force* (*dynamis chathartiche*) much stronger than ordinary philosophy *that talks much and can do nothing* (*anem ton phrattein mechri ton legein*) (Epictetus, *apud Agellium* 17.9). And it must be admitted that the machines invented by the Stoics to raise man above himself were not bad, while awaiting better.

[18] [As Darcel points out, Maistre here misrepresents Hobbes, who argued that society was in a state of war prior to the establishment of government. (Darcel ed.)]

of God? Do we not see that when political revolutions suspend this divine power, unfortunate nations that experience these political commotions quickly fall into the state of war, that force seizes the sceptre, and that this nation is tormented by a deluge of crimes.

Therefore government is not a matter of choice. It is even the result of the nature of things: it is impossible that man be what he is and that he not be governed, for a being both social and evil must be under the yoke.

The philosophes of this century who shook the bases of society never ceased to tell us about the views men had in uniting in society. It suffices to cite Rousseau speaking for all of them. *Peoples*, he says, *have given themselves Chiefs to defend their freedom and not to enslave themselves.*[19] This is a gross error, mother of all others. Man *gives* himself nothing; he receives everything. He has chiefs because he cannot do without them, and society neither is nor can be the result of a pact. Society is the result of a law.

The author of all things not having judged it appropriate to subjugate man to beings of a superior nature, and man left to be governed by his fellows, it is clear that what is good in man must govern what is evil. Man, like all thinking beings, is tertiary in his nature. This nature possesses an *understanding* that learns, a reason or a *Logos* that compares and judges, and a *love* or a will that decides and acts. Although man is weakened in his first two faculties, he is only really wounded in the third, and even here the *blow* that he received did not deprive him of his original qualities. He *wills* the evil, but he *would will* the good. He acts against himself; he turns on himself; he grovels painfully like a reptile whose back has been broken. The half-life that remains to him was expressed very philosophically by an assembly of men in no way *philosophe* when they said that the will of man (or his liberty, which is the same thing) is *crippled.*[20]

The laws of justice and moral beauty are engraved in our hearts in indelible characters, and the most abominable scoundrel invokes them every day. See these two brigands who are waiting for the traveller in the forest.

[19] *Discours sur l'inégalité*, p. 146. [*CW*, 3:56.]

[20] [In his *St Petersburg Dialogues*, Maistre cites the Council of Trent (Sixth Session), which he claims was echoing Cicero when it described the state of the will under the rule of sin as *Liberum arbitrium fractum atque debilitatum* (free choice maimed and emasculated). Cicero's supposed phrase, from *Letters to his Friends* 1.9 according to Maistre, is *fracta et debilitata* (broken and weakened). Unfortunately, both Maistre's references appear faulty. While Cicero uses similar language elsewhere, this phrase does not appear in the place cited. Nor does the first phrase appear in the decrees of Sixth Session of Trent. See *St Petersburg Dialogues*, ed. Richard A. Lebrun (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 1993), 36n2.]

They massacre him and strip him. One takes his watch, the other his box, but the box is decorated with diamonds. THIS IS NOT FAIR, cries the first, *it must be divided equally*. Oh divine conscience, your sacred voice does not cease to make itself heard; always it will make us blush for what we are; always it will warn us of what we can be.

However, since this celestial voice always makes itself heard, and even makes itself obeyed whenever man has not been *led ignobly into himself by the evil principle that makes him the slave of his senses, and of the passions that are their instruments*; since man is infallible when his vulgar interest is not placed between his conscience and the truth, he can therefore be governed by his fellow, provided that this one has the force to make himself obeyed. For this sovereign power residing on a single head, or on a small number of heads in relation to the subjects, there will necessarily be an infinity of cases where this power will have no interest in being unjust. From this follows the general theory that it is better to be governed than not, and that any association will be more lasting and will move more surely towards its end if it has a chief than if each member preserves his equality with respect to all the others, and that the more the chief is separated from his subordinates, the less contacts he has with them, the more advantageous it will be, because there will be less chance in favour of passion as against reason.

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On the Sovereignty of the People

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BOOK ONE

On the Origins of Sovereignty

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CHAPTER ONE

On the Sovereignty of the People

Non illi imperium.[1] Virgil

The people is sovereign, they say; and over whom? Over itself apparently. The people is therefore subject. There is surely something equivocal here, if not an error, for the people that *commands* is not the people that *obeys*. Therefore it suffices to enunciate the general proposition *the people is sovereign* to realize that it needs a commentary.

This commentary will not be long in coming, at least in the French system. The people, they will say, exercises its sovereignty by means of its representatives. We begin to understand. The people is a sovereign that cannot exercise sovereignty. Each individual male among this people has the right to command in turn only during a certain period: for example, if one supposes 25 million men in France and 700 eligible deputies every two years, one understands that if these 25 million men were immortal and the deputies were named in turn, each Frenchman would periodically be king once every three thousand five hundred years. However since in this period some cannot help but die from time to time, and as the electors are free to choose as masters whomever they please, the imagination is frightened by the shocking number of kings condemned to die without having reigned.

Since it is necessary to examine this question more seriously, let us first observe that on this point as on so many others it could well turn out that one has not made oneself understood. So let us begin by posing the question properly.

People have had heated discussions over the issue of whether sovereignty comes from God or from men, but I do not know if it has been observed that both propositions can be true.

[1] ["It does not have the lordship." *Aeneid* 1.138.]

It is quite true, in an inferior and crude sense, that sovereignty is founded on human consent, for if any people suddenly agreed not to obey, sovereignty would disappear, and it is impossible to imagine the establishment of a sovereignty without imagining a people consenting to obey. If therefore the opponents of the divine origin of sovereignty only want to say this, they are right, and it would be quite useless to dispute it. God not having judged it appropriate to employ supernatural instruments for the establishment of empires, it is certain that everything has had to be done by men. But to say that sovereignty does not come from God because he uses men to establish it, is to say that he is not man's creator because we all have a father and mother.

All the *theists*[2] in the world would undoubtedly agree that anyone who violates laws opposes himself to the divine will and renders himself guilty before God although he has only violated human ordinances; for it is God who created man a social being, and since he *willed* society, he also *willed* sovereignty and the laws without which there is no society.

Therefore laws come from God in the sense that he wills that there be laws and that they be obeyed, and nevertheless laws also come from men since they are made by men.

In the same way sovereignty comes from God, since he is the author of everything, except evil, and in particular he is the author of society, which cannot subsist without sovereignty.

However sovereignty also comes from men in a certain sense, that is to say to the extent that this or that form of government is established and declared by human consent.

The partisans of divine authority therefore cannot deny that human will plays some role in the establishment of governments, and the partisans of the opposite system cannot deny that God is pre-eminently and in a conspicuous way the author of these governments.

It appears then that these two propositions, *sovereignty comes from God* and *sovereignty comes from men*, are not absolutely contradictory, any more than these other two, *laws come from God* and *laws come from men*.

So for these ideas to be understood it suffices to put them in their proper place and not to confuse them. With these precautions we are

[2] Although this word in its original meaning was a synonym for *deist*, usage has simply opposed it to *atheist*, and it is in this sense that I use it. This is a necessary word, since *deist* excludes belief in any kind of revelation.

[This anglicism was introduced into French by Voltaire in his *Dictionnaire philosophique*; he used it as well in his *Essai sur les moeurs* (1769). (Darcel ed.)]

sure not to go astray, and it seems that one can listen with favour to the writer who says: "I am not going to tell you whether sovereignty comes from God or from men; let us together examine only what there is of the divine and what there is of the human in sovereignty."

CHAPTER TWO

The Origin of Society

Creating difficulties for himself for the pleasure of resolving them is a strange human mania. The mysteries that surround man on all sides do not suffice for him, and so he rejects clear ideas, and, by an inexplicable prideful detour that makes him regard it as beneath him to believe what everyone else believes, he reduces everything to a problem. So, for example, there have been long disputes on the origins of society; and instead of the quite simple supposition that comes naturally to mind, there has been a lavish use of all kinds of metaphysical theories to construct airy hypotheses condemned by good sense and experience.

When the causes of the origin of society are posed as a problem, it is obviously assumed that for human kind there existed a time prior to society; but this is precisely what has to be proved.

No one will deny that the earth was intended for man's habitation; now, as the multiplication of man entered into the intentions of the Creator, it follows that the nature of man is to be united in large societies over the whole surface of the globe. The nature of a being is to exist as the Creator wanted it to exist, and this will is perfectly declared by the facts.

The isolated man therefore is not *the man of nature*; when a small number of men were scattered over a large surface of terrain, the human species was not yet what it had to be. At that time there were only families, and these families so distributed were still, either individually or by their subsequent union, only the embryos of nations.

And if, long after the formation of large societies, some tribes lost in deserts still present us with the phenomenon of the human species in its infancy, these are always infant peoples, who have not yet become what they should be.

What would we think of a naturalist who would say that man is an animal 30 to 35 inches long, without strength or intelligence, and

uttering only inarticulate cries? However this naturalist, in giving to man only the physical and moral nature that characterizes an infant, would be no more ridiculous than the philosopher searching for the political nature of this being in the *rudiments* of society.

Every question about the *nature* of man must be resolved by history. The philosopher who wants to prove to us by a priori reasoning what man must be, does not merit being heard; he substitutes reasons of convenience for experience, and his own decisions for the Creator's will.

I suppose that someone could succeed in proving that a savage in America has more happiness and fewer vices than a civilized man. Could one conclude that the latter is a degraded being, or if you like, further from *nature* than the first? Not at all. This is precisely as if one were to say that the nature of the individual man is to remain an infant because in infancy he is exempt from the vices and the misfortunes that must beset him in manhood. History constantly shows men united in fairly numerous societies, and ruled by different sovereigns. As soon as they multiply beyond a certain point, they cannot exist in any other way. Everything that happened before the formation of societies is unknown to us and alien to the true destiny of man.

Therefore, properly speaking, for *man* there has never been a time prior to society, because before the formation of political societies, man was not quite man, and because it is absurd to look for the characteristics of a particular being in the embryo of that being.

Therefore society is not the work of man, but the immediate result of the will of the Creator who has willed that man be what he always and everywhere has been.

Rousseau and all the reasoners of his kind imagine or try to imagine a people *in the state of nature* (this is their expression), deliberating formally on the advantages and disadvantages of the social state and finally deciding to pass from one to the other. However there is not a shadow of good sense in this supposition. What were these men doing before this *National Convention* in which they finally decided to give themselves a sovereign? Apparently they lived without laws and without government; but for how long?

It is a capital mistake to represent the social state as a chosen state founded on the consent of men, on a deliberation, and on an original contract, which is impossible. To talk of *the state of nature* as opposed to the social state, is to talk nonsense voluntarily. The word *nature* is one of those general terms that is abused like all abstract terms. This word, in its most extended meaning, really signifies only the whole mass of laws, forces, and relations that constitute the universe, and *the particular nature* of such and such a being the total of qualities that

constitute what it is, and without which it would be something else and be unable to fulfil the intentions of the worker. Thus, the union of all the pieces that make up a machine designed to tell time forms the *nature* or the essence of the *watch*; and the *nature* or the essence of the balance wheel is to have such and such form, dimensions, and position; otherwise it would no longer be a balance wheel and it would not be able to fulfil its functions. The *nature* of a viper is to creep, to have a scaly skin, and hollow and movable fangs that discharge a mortal poison, etc. The *nature* of man is to be an intelligent, religious, and social animal. An invariable experience teaches us this, and I see nothing that can be opposed to this experience. If someone wants to prove that the nature of a viper is to have wings and a melodious voice, and that that of the beaver is live isolated on the summits of the highest mountains, it is up to him to prove it. While waiting, we believe what is, must be, and has always been.

"The social order," Rousseau says, "is a sacred *right* that serves as a basis for all the others. However this right does not come from nature; it is therefore based on conventions."[1]

What is *nature*? What is a *right*? And how is an *order* a *right?* ... But let us pass over these difficulties; questions are never ending with a man who abuses every term and defines none. However we at least have the right to ask him to prove this great assertion: "*The social order does not come from nature.*" "I should," he himself says, "establish what I have just asserted."[2] This, in effect, is what he would have to do; but the way he set about it is truly curious. He uses three chapters to prove that the social order comes neither from the family, nor from force or slavery (chapters 2, 3, and 4), and then he concludes (chapter 5) that "*that it is always necessary to go back to a first convention.*"[3] This way of demonstrating is convenient; all that is lacking is the majestic formula of geometers: "*this is what was to be demonstrated.*"

It is quite peculiar that Rousseau did not even attempt to prove the one thing that it was necessary to prove. For if the social order comes from nature, there is no social compact.

"Before examining," he says, "the act by which a nation elects a king,[4] it would be well to examine the act by which a people becomes a people. For this act, being necessarily prior to the other, is the true

1 *Contrat social*, Bk. I, chap. i. [*CW*, 4:131]

2 [*Contrat social*, Bk. I, chap. i. *CW*, 4:131]

3 [Ibid., chapter title: Bk. I, chap. 5. *CW*, 4:137.]

4 Why a *king*? One would have to say a *sovereign*.

basis of society."[5] – "It is the eternal mania of philosophers," this philosopher tells us elsewhere, "to deny what is and to explain what is not."[6] For our part, let us add: it is Rousseau's eternal mania to make fun of philosophers,[7] without suspecting that he was also a *philosopher* in the full sense that he attributes to the word. Thus, for example, from one end to the other the *Social Contract* denies the nature of man, which exists, to explain the *social compact*, which *does not exist.*

So this is how they reason when they separate man from the Divinity. Instead of tiring themselves finding only error, it would cost them little to turn their eyes toward the source of being, but such a simple, sure, and consoling way of philosophizing is not to the taste of the writers of this unfortunate century whose real sickness is a horror of good sense.

Did they not say that man, this property of God,[8] is thrown onto the earth by a blind cause; that he could be this or that, and that it is by his own choice that he is what he is? Certainly, God in creating *man* intended some purpose. So the question reduces itself to knowing if man became a *political animal*,[9] as Aristotle says, *by* or *against* the divine will. Although this question openly announced in this way is a veritable stroke of madness, it is nevertheless posed in an indirect way in a multitude of writings whose authors decide often enough for the negative. The word *nature* has led to a multitude of errors. Let us repeat that the nature of a being is nothing but the sum of qualities attributed to that being by the Creator. Burke said with a depth that it

[5] Ibid., chap. 5. [*CW*, 4:137.]

[6] *Nouvelle Héloïse*. [This appears to be an incorrect reference. Rousseau has a similar diatribe against philosophers in his *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (Pléiade 3:27). (Darcel ed.)]

[7] See in *Emile*, Bk. III, the striking portrait Rousseau has drawn of these gentlemen. He only forgot to add: *Et quorum pars magna fui* ["Whereof I was no small part." Virgil *Aeneid* 2.6. Loeb.]. [The portrait is from the Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar in Book IV. Pléiade, 3:568. The passage reads: "I consulted the philosphers. I leafed through their books. I examined their various opinions. I found them all to be proud, assertive, dogmatic (even in their pretended scepticism), ignorant of nothing, proving nothing, mocking one another." Bloom, 268.]

[8] Plato's beautiful expression will be found in the *Phaedo*. ["But this at least, Cebes, I do believe is sound, that the gods are our guardians and that we men are one of the chattels of the gods." *Phaedo* 62b. Trans. Harold North Fowler, Loeb Classical Library 1960.]

[9] This expression will be found in Aristotle's *Politics* 2.1.

is impossible to admire enough that *art is man's nature*:[10] yes, undoubtedly, man with all his affections, all his knowledge, all his arts, is truly *the man of nature*, and the weaver's web is as *natural* as the spider's.

The *state of nature* for man is therefore to be what he is today and what he has always been, that is to say *sociable*; all the annals of the world establish this truth. Because we have found in the forests of America, a new country about which everything has not yet been said, vagabond hordes we call *savages*, it does not follow that man is not naturally sociable. The savage is an exception, and consequently proves nothing; he has fallen from the *natural state* or he has not yet arrived at it. Note well that the savage is not even an exception properly speaking, for this kind of men lives in society and knows sovereignty just as we do. His Majesty the Chief covers himself with a greasy beaver skin instead of Siberian fox fur; he dines royally on his imprisoned enemy, instead of allowing him parole on his word, as in our degraded Europe. But, after all, among savages there is a society, a sovereignty, a government, and laws of some sort. As for true or false stories of individual humans found in the woods and living absolutely like animals, we may no doubt dispense ourselves from examining theories founded on these sorts of facts, or tales.

[10] [Maistre would have found this formula in *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791).]

CHAPTER THREE

Of Sovereignty in General

If sovereignty is not anterior to a *people*, at least these two ideas are collateral, since it takes a sovereign to make a *people*. It is as impossible to imagine a human society without a sovereign as a hive and a swarm without a queen, for a swarm, in virtue of the eternal laws of nature, exists in this way or it does not exist. Society and sovereignty are therefore born together; it is impossible to separate these two ideas. You can imagine an isolated man, but then there are no longer laws nor government, since he is not altogether a man, and there is not yet a society. As soon as you put man in contact with his kind, from this moment you suppose a sovereign since you suppose a society, which cannot exist without a sovereign. The first man was king of his children;[1] each isolated family was governed in the same way. However as soon as families came in contact, they needed a sovereign, and this *sovereign* made them a *people* by giving them laws, since a society exists only through a sovereign. Everyone knows this famous verse:

> The first king was a lucky soldier.[2]

Perhaps no one has ever said anything more false; on the contrary one would have to say that *the first soldier was paid by a king.*[3]

[1] In observing that a human association cannot exist without some kind of domination, I do not intend to establish an exact parity between paternal authority and sovereign authority; everything has been said on this point.

[2] [Voltaire, *Mérope*, I, 3.]

[3] [*Le premier soldat fut soldé par un roi.* Maistre's pun on the resemblance between the French words *soldat* (soldier) and *solder* (to pay) is impossible to capture in translation.]

There was a *people*, some kind of civilization, and a sovereign as soon as men came into contact. The word *people* is a relative term that has no meaning separated from the idea of sovereignty, for the idea of *people* evokes that of an aggregation around a common centre, and without sovereignty a people cannot come together nor have political unity.

Therefore we must dismiss to the realm of the imagination the ideas of choice and deliberation in the establishment of society and sovereignty. This operation is the immediate work of nature, or to put it better, of its author.

If men have spurned such simple and such evident ideas, we must pity them. Let us accustom ourselves to seeing in human society the expression of the divine will. The more these false doctors have tried to isolate us and to detach the branch from its trunk, the more we must attach ourselves to it under pain of drying up and rotting.

CHAPTER FOUR

Of Particular Sovereignties and Nations

The same power that decreed the social order and sovereignty has also decreed different modifications of sovereignty according to the different characters of nations.

Nations are born and perish like individuals; nations have *Fathers*, literally, and *founders* ordinarily more celebrated than their fathers, although the greatest merit of these founders was to penetrate the character of an infant people, and to place it in circumstances that could develop it fully.

Nations have a common *soul* and a true moral unity that makes them what they are. This unity is announced above all by language.

The Creator laid out the limits of nations on the globe, and St Paul spoke philosophically to the Athenians when he said to them: *From one man he has created the whole human race and made them live all over the face of the earth, determining their appointed times and the boundaries of their lands.* (Acts, 17:26) These boundaries are visible, and we always see each nation straining to fill up completely one of the spaces enclosed within these boundaries. Sometimes invincible circumstances precipitate two nations into one another and force them to mingle; then their constituting principles interpenetrate and the resulting *hybrid* nation can be more or less powerful and renowned than the *pure* race was.

However several principles of nations thrown into the same receptacle can be mutually harmful. The seeds compress and stifle each other. The men who compose them, condemned to a certain moral and political mediocrity, will never attract the eyes of the world despite a great number of individual merits, until a great shock, allowing one of

these seeds to grow, permits it to swallow up the others and assimilate them into its own substance. *Italiam! Italiam!*[1]

Sometimes a nation subsists in the midst of another much more numerous nation, refusing to assimilate because there is not enough affinity between them, and so conserves its moral unity. Then, if some extraordinary event comes to disorganize the dominant nation, or to impress on it a great movement, we will be very astonished to see the other resist the general impulse and give itself a contrary movement. Thus the miracle of the Vendée. Other malcontents in the realm, although much more numerous, can accomplish nothing similar because these malcontents are only *men*, while the Vendée is a *nation*. Salvation can even come from this, for the *soul* that presides at these miraculous efforts has, like all active powers, an expansionary force that makes it constantly strive to grow, in a way that, by assimilating to itself little by little whatever resembles it and pressing out the rest, can finally acquire enough preponderance to achieve a prodigy.

Sometimes too, national unity is strongly evident in a very small tribe; as it cannot have a language of its own, it consoles itself by appropriating that of its neighbours, giving it an accent and particular forms. Its virtues are its own; its vices are its own; so as not to have the ridiculous ones of the other people it adopts its own. Without physical force, it will make itself known. Tormented by the need to act, it will be conquering in its own way. Nature, by one of those contrasts that it loves, will place it, playfully, beside frivolous or apathetic peoples who will make it noticed from afar. Its plunderings will be cited in the realm of opinion; finally it will make its mark, it will be cited, it will succeed in putting itself in the balance with great names, and they will say: *I cannot decide between Geneva and Rome.*

When we speak of the *genius* of a nation, the expression is not as metaphorical as we might think.

From these different characteristics of nations are born the different modifications of governments. We can say that each one has its own character, for even those that belong to the same class and have the same name present different nuances to the eye of the observer.

The same laws cannot be suited to such a variety of provinces, which have different morals, live in contrasting climates, and cannot tolerate the same form of government ...[2]

[1] [Italy! Italy!]

[2] [This paragraph is a citation from Rousseau's *Contrat social*, Bk. II, chap. ix. *CW*, 4:159.]

These general objects of all good institutions should be modified in each country according to the relationships that arise as much from the local situation as from the character of the inhabitants, and it is on the basis of these relationships that each people must be assigned a particular system of institutions that is the best, not perhaps in itself, but for the State for which it is designed ...[3]

There is no more than one good government possible in a State. But as a thousand events can change the relationships of a people, not only can different Governments be suited to different peoples, but also to the same people at different times! ...[4]

People have always argued a great deal over the best form of Government, without considerating that each of them is best in certain cases, and the worst in others! ...[5]

Therefore it is not necessary to believe that "*all forms of government are [...] suited to all countries. Freedom, not being the fruit of every Climate, is not accessible to all peoples. The more one ponders this principle established by Montesquieu, the more one senses its truth. The more it is contested, the more opportunities there are to establish it by new proofs.*"[6]

Therefore when one asks which is absolutely the best Government, one poses a question that is insoluble because it is indeterminate. Or, if you prefer, it has as many correct answers as there are possible combinations in the absolute and relative situations of peoples.[7]

From these incontestable principles is born a consequence that is no less incontestable: this is that the social contact is a chimera. For if there are as many different governments as there are peoples, if the forms of these governments are imperiously prescribed by the power that gives each nation its moral, physical, geographical, commercial positions, etc., it is no longer permitted to speak of *compact*. Each form of sovereignty is the immediate result of the will of the Creator, like sovereignty in general. Despotism, for a given nation, is as natural, as legitimate, as democracy is for another.[8] And if a man himself

[3] [This paragraph is also from the *Contrat social*, Bk. II, chap. xi. *CW*, 4:163.]

[4] [This paragraph is from the *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. i. *CW*, 4:167.]

[5] [This paragraph is from the *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. iii. *CW*, 4:172.]

[6] [*Contrat social*, Book III, chap. viii. *CW*, 4:181.]

[7] [This paragraph, too, is from Rousseau, *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. ix. *CW*, 4:185.]

[8] Will it be be said, even by this same hypothesis, that there is always a compact in virtue of which each contracting party strives to maintain the government as it is? In this case, for despotism or absolute monarchy, the compact will be precisely that which Rousseau ridicules at the end of his pitiful chapter on

establishes these immovable[9] principles in a book expressly made in order to establish that "*it is always necessary to go back to a first convention*,"[10] if he writes in one chapter that "man is born free,"[11] and in another that "freedom, not being a fruit of every Climate, is not accessible to all peoples,"[12] this man would be, without contradiction, one of the most ridiculous in the world.

No nation being able to give itself the character or position that renders it fit for a particular government, all agree not only in believing this truth in an abstract way, but in believing that the divinity has intervened directly in the establishment of their particular sovereignties.

The Sacred Scriptures show us the first king of the chosen people, elected, and consecrated by an immediate intervention of the divinity;[13] the annals of every nation in the world assign the same origin to their particular governments. Only the names change. All, after following the succession of their princes back to a somewhat remote epoch, finally arrive at those mythological times whose true history would instruct us much better than all the others. All show us the cradle of sovereignty surrounded by miracles; always divinity intervenes in the foundation of empires; always the first sovereign, at least, is a favourite of heaven: he receives the sceptre from the hands of the divinity. Divinity communicates with him, it inspires him; it engraves on his forehead the sign of its power; and the laws that he dictates to his fellows are only the fruit of his celestial communications.

These are fables, they will say; in truth I know nothing about it. However the fables of all peoples, even of modern peoples, cover many realities. The *holy ampoule*,[14] for example, is only a hieroglyph; it suffices to know how to read it. The healing power attributed to certain princes or to certain dynasties of princes also results from this

slavery. "I make a convention with you that is entirely at your expense and entirely for my benefit; that I shall observe for as long as I want, and that you shall observe for as long as I want." (*Contrat social*, Bk. I, chap. iv.) [*CW*, 4:137.]

9 *Contrat social*, Bk. II, chaps. ix, xi; Bk. III, chaps. i, iii, viii.

10 Ibid., Bk. I, chap. v. [*CW*, 4:137.]

11 Ibid., Bk. I, chap. i. [*CW*, 4:131.]

12 Ibid., Bk. III, chap. viii. [*CW*, 4:181.]

13 [King Saul. See 1 Kings 10:1. (Darcel ed.)]

14 [From the time of Clovis, kings of France were anointed at their coronation with holy oil, which was said to have been delivered to St Remi by a dove from heaven. Prior to the Revolution, the holy oil had been preserved at Rheims in a vial known as the *sainte ampoule*. A commissioner of the revolutionary Convention smashed the vial on 6 October 1793.]

universal dogma of the divine origin of sovereignty. Do not be surprised that the antique founders of nations all spoke in the name of God. They sensed that they did not have the right to speak in their own name. It is of them moreover that we can say without exaggeration: "*Est Deus in nobis, agitante calescimus ipso.*"[15] This century's philosophers have complained a great deal about the alliance between the empire and the priesthood. Men have undoubtedly abused everything, but the wise observer cannot dispense himself from admiring their obstinacy in blending these two things; the more one goes back towards antiquity, the more one finds religious legislation. Everything that nations have told us of their origins proves that they are agreed in regarding sovereignty as divine in its essence; otherwise they would all have told us very different tales. Never do they speak to us of a *primordial contract*, of voluntary association, of popular deliberation. No historian cites the *primary assemblies* of Memphis or Babylon. It is truly folly to imagine that this universal prejudice is the work of sovereigns. Special interest might well abuse the general belief, but it cannot create it. If that of which I speak had not been founded on the inner consent of peoples, not only could they not have been made to adopt it, but the sovereigns could not have imagined such a fraud. In general, every universal idea is natural.

[15] ["There is a God within us. It is when he stirs that our bosom warms." Ovid *Fasti* 6.5. Trans. James George Frazer, Loeb Classical Library 1951.]

CHAPTER FIVE

Examination of Some of Rousseau's Ideas on the Legislator

Rousseau wrote a chapter *on the legislator* where all his ideas are mixed up in the most intolerable way. In the first place, this word *legislator* can have two different meanings: usage permits giving this title to the extraordinary man who promulgates constitutional laws, and to the much less admirable man who issues civil laws. It appears that Rousseau understood the word in the first sense, since he talks of the one "who dares to undertake the founding of a people." But soon afterwards, he says that "*the legislator is an extraordinary man* IN THE STATE *in all respects.*"[1] Here there is already a state; the nation is therefore constituted: therefore it is no longer a question of *instituting* a nation, but at most of reforming it.

Then he cites, mercilessly and all at the same time, Lycurgus, modern legislators of the republics of Italy, Calvin, and the decemvirs.

Calvin can thank Rousseau for putting him alongside Lycurgus; certainly he needed such an introduction, and without Rousseau he would never have found himself in such good company.

As for the decemvirs, Rome was 300 years old and possessed all its fundamental laws, when three deputies went looking for civil laws in Greece; and I do not see that we must regard the decemvirs as beings above the human sphere[2] for having said: SI IN JUS VOCAT, ATQUE EAT SI CALVITUR PEDEMVE STRUIT, MANUM ENDO JACITO[3] and a thousand

[1] [*Contrat social*, Bk. II, chap. vii. *CW*, 4:155. Maistre's small capitals.]

[2] "The legislator is an extraordinary man in the State in all respects. ... This function ... has nothing in common with human dominion." (*Contrat social*, Bk. II, chap. vii.) [*CW*, 4:155.]

[3] ["If the judge summons him in justice, then he goes there; if he errs or looks to escape, they lay hands on him." Law of the Twelve Tables. (Darcel ed.)]

other certainly very beautiful things about legacies, testaments, funeral ceremonies, roads, gargoyles, and gutters, but which are nevertheless a little below the creations of Lycurgus.

Rousseau confuses all these ideas, and he affirms in general that the legislator is neither an official nor a sovereign. His function, he says, "has nothing in common with human dominion."[4] If Rousseau wants to say that a private individual can be consulted by a sovereign, and can propose to him good laws that might be accepted, this is one of those truths so trivial and so sterile that it is useless to bother about them. If he intends to maintain that a sovereign cannot make civil laws, as the decemvirs did, this is a discovery worthy of him, no one ever having suspected it. If he intends to prove that a sovereign cannot be a legislator in the full sense of the word, and give peoples truly constitutional laws by creating or perfecting their public law, I appeal to universal history.

However universal history never embarrasses Rousseau, for when it condemns him (which happens almost always), he says that it is wrong. "He who drafts the laws," he says, "therefore, does not or *should not have* any legislative right."[5]

Here we must remain silent: Rousseau himself speaking as a legislator, there is nothing more to say. Since he also cites history, it is useful to examine how he acquits himself in this genre.

"During its finest period," he says, "Rome ... nearly perished as a result of combining legislative authority and sovereign power in the same hands."[6]

In the first place, legislative power and sovereign power being the same thing according to Rousseau, this is as if he had said that the decemvirs united sovereign power and sovereign power.

In the second place, since, following Rousseau himself, "even the Decemvirs never took upon themselves the right to have any law passed on their sole authority,"[7] and since in effect the laws they framed were sanctioned by the assembly of centuries, this again is as if he had said that the decemvirs had the legislative authority and did not have the legislative authority.

Finally, the whole truth, not according to Rousseau, but according to Livy, is that the Romans having had the imprudence to abolish all their magistracies and to unite all powers on the heads of the

4 [*Contrat social*, Bk. II, chap. vii. *CW*, 4:155.]

5 Ibid. [*CW*, 4:156. Maistre's italics.]

6 Ibid. [*CW*, 4:155.]

7 [Ibid. *CW*, 4:156.]

decemvirs,[8] thus created veritable sovereigns who lost their heads like all *impromptu* sovereigns, and abused their power. This again is one of these banal truths that everyone knows, and that is absolutely alien to what Rousseau wants to prove. Let us pass on to Lycurgus.

"When Lycurgus," he says, "gave his fatherland laws, he began by abdicating the Throne."[9] These words evidently signify that this famous legislator, *being king*, abdicated the monarchy *at the moment* when he wanted to give laws to his country, and to put himself in a position to give them to it. Well, up to now we had thought that Lycurgus, to speak exactly, never was king, that he was only believed to be one for a moment, that is to say from the death of his brother until the pregnancy of his sister-in-law was declared; that in truth he governed for eight months as regent and tutor (*Prodicos*) of the young Charilaüs; that in displaying his nephew to the Spartans, and telling them: "Lord Spartans, a king is born to us," he had only carried out an act of strict justice that could not bear the name *abdication*. We had believed, moreover, that Lycurgus thought nothing *of giving laws to his country*; that after this memorable epoch, fatigued by the intrigues and the hate of his brother's widow and his partisans, he travelled to the island of Crete, to Asia Minor, to Egypt, and even, according to a Greek historian, to Spain, and to Africa, and even to the Indies; and that it was only after his return from these long voyages that he undertook his great enterprise, convinced by the reiterated prayers of his compatriots and the oracles of the gods. This is what Plutarch recounts; but Rousseau would be able to say like Molière: "*We have changed all that.*"

This is how well this great statesman knows history!

[8] "It was resolved to appoint decemvirs, subject to no appeal, and to have no other magistrates for that year." Livy [*On the Founding of the City*] 3.32. [Trans. B.O. Foster, Loeb Classical Library 1953.]

[9] *Contrat social*, Bk. II, chap. vii. [*CW*, 4:155.]

CHAPTER SIX

Continuation of the Same Subject

After having seen what the legislator *must not be* according to Rousseau, let us see *what he must be* according to him.

"The discovery," he says, "of the best rules of society suited to Nations would require *a superior intelligence*, who saw all men's passions yet experienced none of them; who would had no relationship at all to our nature and yet knew it thoroughly; whose happiness was independent of us, yet who was nevertheless willing to attend to ours."[1]

This intelligence has already been found. One would have to be very foolish to look for it on earth, or not to see it where it is.

"Gods would be needed to give laws to men."[2]

Not at all, it only takes one.

"One who dares to undertake the founding of a people should feel that he is capable of changing human nature, so to speak; of transforming each individual, who by himself is a perfect and solitary whole, into a part of a larger whole from which this individual receives, in a sense, his life and his being; of altering man's constitution in order to strengthen it; of substituting a partial and moral existence for the physical and independent existence we have all received from nature. He must, in short, take away man's own forces in order to give him forces that are foreign to him and that he cannot make use of without the help of others."[3]

The *founder of a nation* is a man whose distinctive quality is a certain *practical* good sense utterly opposed to metaphysical subtleties. Lycurgus would not have understood a word of the tirade we have just read, and would have recommended the author to the powerful Aesculapius [the god

[1] *Contrat social*, Bk. II, chap. vi: The Legislator. [*CW*, 4:154. Maistre's italics.]

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid. [*CW*, 4:155.]

of medicine]. What is the *transformation* of an *individual* whose essence and purpose have been determined by the Supreme Being? What is *a complete and independent whole*? Where, when, and how did such a marvel exist? What is *man's constitution*? What does *altering man's constitution to strengthen it* mean? What is *independent and physical existence* for a being that is in essence spiritual, moral, and dependent? Thank God that it is not on such spider webs that good sense builds empires.

"Thus one finds combined in the work of legislation two things that seem incompatible: an undertaking beyond human force and, to execute it, an authority that amounts to nothing."[4]

On the contrary, the founder of a nation has, for the execution of his enterprise, *an authority that is everything*. For "he was born to command, having from nature a grace and effectiveness in enticing men to obey him voluntarily because he was loved by the gods, and a god rather than a man."[5]

Rousseau then shows perfectly how and why all legislators have had to speak in the name of the divinity; then he adds these remarkable words:

"But it is not every man who can make the Gods speak or be believed when he declares himself their interpreter. The Legislator's great soul is the true miracle that should prove his mission. Any man can engrave stone tablets, buy an oracle, pretend to have a secret relationship with some divinity, train a bird to talk in his ear, or find other crude ways to impress the people. One who knows only that much might even assemble, by chance, a crowd of madmen, but he will never found an empire, and his extravagant work will soon die along with him."[6]

Such is Rousseau's character. He often discovers particular truths, and expresses them better than anyone; but these truths are sterile in his hands. Almost always he concludes badly, because his pride constantly draws him from the paths beaten by good sense to throw him into eccentricity. No one shapes their materials better than he, no one builds more poorly. Everything is good in his works except his systems.

After this brilliant and even profound morsel that we have just read, we expect interesting conclusions on the organization of societies. Here is the result:

[4] Ibid. [*CW*, 4:156.]

[5] Plutarch, in *Lycurgus*. [In chapter v of his life of Lycurgus, Plutarch writes: "in him [Lycurgus] there was a nature fitted to lead, and a power to make men follow him. ... the Pythian priestess addressed him as 'beloved of the gods, and rather god than man.'" Trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 1967.]

[6] *Contrat social*, Bk. II, chap. vii. [*CW*, 4:157.]

"One must not conclude from all this, as Warburton does, that politics and religion have a common object for us, but rather that at the origin of nations, one serves as an instrument of the other."[7]

Desinit in piscem.[8] Warburton,[9] who understood himself, never said that politics and religion have *the same aim among us*, which means nothing. However he was able to say quite correctly that politics will not achieve its aim if religion does not serve as its base.

[7] Ibid. [*CW*, 4:157.]

[8] ["Ends up as a fish." Horace *Art of Poetry* 4. Horace is referring to fabulous creatures, woman above and fish below: "What at the top is a lovely woman ends below in a black and ugly fish." (Loeb) In using this tag, Maistre accuses Rousseau of reaching an incongruous conclusion.]

[9] [William Warburton (1698–1779), Anglican bishop of Gloucester, was a theologian who devoted two books to church-state relations: *The Alliance between Church and State* (1736) and *The Divine Legation of Moses* (1737–41). Joseph de Maistre often cited the second of these works in his notebooks. See Richard Lebrun, "Les lectures de J. de Maistre," *REM* no. 9 (1985): 135 and 137. (Darcel ed.)]

CHAPTER SEVEN

Of Founders and the Political Constitution of Nations

When we reflect on the moral unity of nations, we cannot doubt that this is the result of a single cause. What the wise Bonnet[1] said about the animal body in refuting Buffon's dream can be said about the political body: every seed is necessarily *one*, and it is always from a single man that each people gets its dominant trait and its distinctive character.

To know then why and how a man literally *engenders* a nation, and how he communicates to it this moral temperament, this character, this common soul that must, through the centuries and an infinite number of generations, subsist in a sensible way and distinguish one nation from all others, this is a mystery like so many others on which one can meditate usefully.

The genealogies of nations are written in their languages. Like peoples, idioms are born, grow, mingle, interpenetrate, associate with each other, combat each other, and die.

Certain languages have perished in the full sense of the word, like Egyptian; others, like Greek and Latin, are dead in only one sense, and still live through writing.

[1] [Charles Bonnet (1720–1793) was a Genevan scholar and philosopher whose works had an important influence on the anti-philosophe current of thought. Maistre, who had Bonnet's *Palingénésie philosophique* (Geneva 1770) in his library, was attracted to the Genevan's works as much for philosophic as for scientific reasons. In the quarrel that opposed the partisans of the pre-existence of germs (Leibniz on the philosophic side, and Bonnet, Haller, and Spallanzani on the scientific side) to the partisans of spontaneous generation or epigensis (Needham, Buffon, and Maupertuis), Maistre aligned himself with the first, presumably defenders of the spiritualist thesis, against what was judged a mechanist or materialist thesis. (Darcel ed.)]

There is one of these, Hebrew, which is perhaps the most ancient of all: whether considered in itself or as a dialect of *Syriac*, it still lives in its entirety in Arabic, and the passage of fifteen centuries has been unable to efface its traits.

The mixture of idioms produces the same confusion as the mixture of peoples; yet we are not entirely lost in this labyrinth; and the penetrating eye of Sir William Jones can go back, through a host of dialects most alien to our ears, to the three primitive nations from which the others descend.[2]

The development of these lofty speculations, however, does not belong to this work. I return to my subject by observing that the government of a nation is no more its own work than its language. Just as in nature the seeds of an infinity of plants are destined to perish unless the wind or the hand of man places them in a place where they can germinate, so there are in nations certain qualities, certain forces, which are only potential until they receive their development by simple circumstances or by circumstances made use of by a skilful hand.

The founder of a nation is precisely this skilful hand. Gifted with an extraordinary penetration, or, what is more probable, with an infallible instinct (for often genius is quite unconscious of how it operates, and this is especially how it differs from intelligence), he divines those hidden forces and qualities that form the character of his nation; he divines the means to bring them to life, to put them in motion, and to get the most from them. We never see him writing or arguing: his style of action comes from inspiration; and if he sometimes takes up the pen, it is not to write dissertations, it is to command.

One of the great errors of this century is to be believe that the political constitution of nations is a purely human work, and that one can make a constitution as a clock maker makes a watch. This is quite false, but what is still more false is the belief that this great work can be executed by an assembly of men. The author of all things has only two ways of giving a government to a nation. Almost always he reserves its formation directly to himself by making it grow imperceptibly, as it were, like a plant, by the conjuncture of an infinity of circumstances we call fortuitous. When he wants to lay down the foundations of a political edifice all at once, however, and to show the

[2] *Asiatic Researches* (Calcutta 1792) vol. III. [Sir William Jones (1746–1794), also known as "Oriental Jones," was a brilliant linguist, Orientalist, and jurist. He was one of the first Europeans to master Sanskrit, and his translation of the "laws of Manu" (also called Menu) was a momentous achievement. Jones was a major source of Maistre's knowledge of India.]

world a creation of this kind, he confides his powers to rare men, to the true elect. Scattered at long intervals through the centuries, they rise like obelisks on the route of time, and to the extent that the human race grows older, they appear more rarely. To fit them for their extraordinary works, God invests them with an extraordinary power, often unrecognized by their contemporaries, and perhaps to themselves. Rousseau himself used the right word when he said that the work of a founder of a nation was a MISSION. It is really a childish idea to transform these great men into charlatans, and to attribute their success to I don't know what kind of *tricks* invented to impose themselves on the multitude. They cite Mohammad's pigeon, the nymph Egeria, etc. If the founders of nations, who were all prodigious men, presented themselves before us and we understood their genius and their means, instead of talking foolishly of usurpation, fraud, and fanaticism, we would prostrate ourselves before them, and our nullity would sink before the sacred sign shining from their brows.

"False tricks can form a fleeting bond; wisdom alone can make it durable. The Jewish law, which is still in existence, and the law of the son of Ishmael, which has ruled half the world for ten centuries, still bear witness today to the great men who formulated them. And whereas proud philosophy or blind partisan spirit regards them merely as lucky imposters, the true political thinker admires in their institutions that great and powerful genius which presides over lasting establishments."[3]

What is certain is that the civil constitution of a people is never the result of a deliberation.

Almost all the great legislators have been kings, and even nations destined to be republics have been constituted by kings; they are the men who preside at the political establishment of nations and who create their first fundamental laws. Thus all the little republics of Greece were first governed by kings, and were free under monarchical authority.[4] Thus, at Rome and at Athens, kings preceded republican governments and were the true founders of liberty.

[3] *Contrat social*, Bk. II, chap. vii. [*CW*, 4:157.]

[4] "For in the beginning all the Greek states were governed by kings, though not despotically, like the barbarian nations, but according to certain laws and time-honoured customs, and he was the best king who was the most just, the most observant of the laws." (Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 5.74.) [Trans. Ernest Cary, Loeb Classical Library 1953.]

The most famous nation of high antiquity, the one that most attracted the curiosity of ancient observers, the one that was the most visible and most studied, Egypt, was never governed but by kings.

The two most famous legislators in the world, Moses and Mohammad, were more than kings; Servius and Numa were kings; Lycurgus was so close to royalty that he had all its authority. He was a Philip of Orleans, with the ascendancy of genius, experience, and virtues. In the middle ages, Charlemagne, St Louis, and Alfred can still be counted in the ranks of constituent legislators.

In short, the greatest legislators have been sovereigns; and Solon, whom I believe the only example of a private citizen, forms a conspicuous exception to the general rule.

As to the little republics of modern Italy, these political atoms merit little of our attention. They no doubt began like those of Greece; moreover we must never occupy ourselves with anything but the general. It was Rousseau's talent (and we must not envy him this) to build systems on exceptions.

Observe all the constitutions in the world, ancient and modern: you will see that from time to time long experience could prescribe some institutions capable of perfecting governments on their original bases, or of preventing some abuses capable of altering their nature. It is possible to assign the date and the authors of these institutions, but the true roots of the government have always existed and it is impossible to display their origin, for the very simple reason that they are as old as the nations and, not being the result of an agreement, there can be no trace of a convention that never existed.

No important and really constitutional institution ever establishes anything new; it simply declares and defends anterior rights: this is why one can never know the constitution of a country by its written constitutional laws, because these laws are made at different times only to declare forgotten or contested rights, and there is always a host of things that are never written.[5]

There is certainly nothing as striking in Roman history as the establishment of tribunes; but this institution established no new right in favour of the people, who only gave themselves magistrates to protect their ancient and constitutional rights against the attacks of the aristocracy. Everyone gained by it, even the patricians. Cicero has given excellent reasons for it that prove clearly that the establishment of these famous magistrates only gave a form to the disordered action

[5] I believe, for example, that the most learned man would be extremely embarrassed to assign the precise limits of the power of the *Roman Senate*.

of the people and protected their constitutional rights.[6] In effect, the Roman people, like all the little nations of Greece of which I was just speaking, was always free, even under its kings. There was a tradition among them that the division of the people into thirty *curiae* went back to Romulus,[7] and that he himself had produced, with the concurrence of the people, some of those laws that they for this reason called *leges curiatæ*. Their successors made several of these laws with the solemn formula: IF IT IS PLEASING TO THE PEOPLE.[8] The right of making war and peace was divided among the king, the senate, and the people in a very remarkable way.[9] Finally, Cicero teaches us that they sometimes called the people in judgement of kings:[10] there is nothing astonishing about this, for the democratic principle existed in the Roman constitution, even under the kings; otherwise it would never have been possible to establish it.[11] Tarquin was by no means

[6] "'The tribunes of the plebs have too much power,' you say. Who can deny it. But the power of the people themselves is much more cruel, much more violent; and yet their power is sometimes milder in practice because there is a leader to control it than if there were none." Cicero *Laws* 3.10. [Trans. Clinton Walker Keyes, Loeb Classical Library 1966.]

[7] [The original assembly of the Roman people was the *comitia curiata* in which they voted by *curiae*.]

[8] "Romulus is said to have divided the people into thirty parts which he called *curiae* because at that time he conducted the care of the state by the votes of these parts and so he himself took certain laws to the people when they had been passed by the *curiae*. The succeeding kings also took laws to the people so that they might ask the people IF THE LAWS WERE PLEASING TO THEM." (Pomponius, in Bk. I, *Dig., de origine juris.*) [Pomponius was a Roman jurist; the reference would be to the *Digest*, a part of the Justinian Code, the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*.]

[9] "... to decide concerning war whenever the king left the decision to them; yet even in these matters their authority was not unrestricted, since the concurrence of the senate was necessary to give effect to their decisions" (Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 2.14 [Loeb]) – Here, then, are the three powers that are to be found, I believe, everywhere we find liberty, at least a lasting liberty.

[10] "There was an appeal to the people even from the kings." (Cicero, *Republic*, Cited from Seneca, Letter 108 [Trans. Clinton Walker Keyes, Loeb Classical Library 1966]; Brottier, on Tacitus *Annals* 2.22.)[On "Brottier," see below, p. 136, note 5.]

[11] "Romulus established a well regulated democracy in his city, because the constitutional laws that he gave them were in accord with the dispositions of democracy and nature." (See Jos. Toscano J.C., *Neapolitani juris publici romani arcana, sive de causis romani juris*, Bk. I, § 2 and 3, pp. 52 and 70.)

expelled because he was a king, but because he was a tyrant;[12] the royal power was given to two annual consuls; the revolution was limited to that. The people did not acquire new rights; they only returned to freedom because they were made for it, because it was born with them, and becaue they had enjoyed it originally. Their chiefs (for the people never does anything) punished the tyrant, not to establish a new constitution, but to re-establish the old, which the tyrant had violated momentarily.

Let us take another example from modern history.

Just as the bases of Roman liberty are much anterior to the establishment of the tribunate, and even to the expulsion of the kings, those of English liberty must be sought well before the revolution of 1688. Liberty could sleep in this nation, but it always existed; one could always say of the English government: *Miscuit res olim dissociabiles, principatum et libertatem.*[13] It is even quite important to notice that the English monarchs to whom the Constitution of this realm owes the most, ALFRED, HENRY II, and EDWARD I, were precisely conquering kings, that is to say those most capable of violating it with impunity; and as an English historian has well observed, it wrongs these great men to maintain, as some persons have done, that England had neither Constitution nor true liberty before the expulsion of the Stuarts.[14] Finally, just as nations *are born*, literally, so governments are also born with them. When we say that a people gave itself a government, it is as if we said that it gave itself a character or a colour. If sometimes we do not know how to distinguish the bases of a government in its infancy, it does not at all follow that they do not exist. You see two embryos: your eye cannot tell the difference between them? However

[12] "The monarchy ... was later rejected, not so much through the fault of the kingship as that of the king." (Cicero *Laws* 3.7.) [Loeb] "Later, when the rule of kings, which at first had tended to preserve freedom and advance the state, had degenerated into a lawless tyranny, they altered their form of government..." (Sallust *The War with Catiline* 6.7.) [Trans. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 1947.]

[13] [Maistre has slightly reworked this citation; in the original it reads: *res olim dissociabiles miscuerit, principatum ac libertatem.* "[Nerva] has united things long imcompatible, Empire and liberty." Tacitus *Agricola* 3.1 Trans. Maurice Hutton, Loeb Classical Library 1970.]

[14] [William] Mitford, *The History of Greece* [(London: J. Murray 1784–1790, 2 vols.)] vol. II. A distinguished member of the opposition (Mr. Grey) said very well, in a session of the Parliament of England on 11 February 1794, that "the bill of rights did not establish new principles for the English Constitution, but only declared what are its true principles." (*Courier de Londres*, 1794, n° 13.)

one is Achilles, and the other Thersites.[15] Do not take developments for creations.

The different forms and different degrees of sovereignty have led to the belief that it was the people who modified these things to suit themselves; but nothing is more false. All nations have the government that suit them, and none has chosen its own. It is even remarkable that it is almost always to their misfortune if they try to give themselves one, or to speak more exactly, if too large a portion of the people act for this objective for, in this fatal groping, it is too easy for them to mistake their true interests, to pursue obstinately what is not suitable for them, and, on the contrary, to reject what would have suited them best; and we know how many terrible errors there are of this kind. This is what made Tacitus say, with his customary insight, that "*that it was far less inconvenient for a people* to accept a *sovereign* than to look for one."[16]

Nevertheless, since every exaggerated proposition is false, I do not intend to deny the possibility of political improvements brought about by a few wise men. That would be no better than to deny the power of moral education and gymnastics for the physical and moral improvement of man. However this truth, far from overturning my general thesis, on the contrary affirms it by establishing that human power can create nothing, and that everything depends on the primordial aptitude of peoples and individuals.

From this it follows that a free constitution is only assured when the different parts of the political structure come into being together and beside one another, so to speak, without the one being the work of the other. Men never respect what they have made themselves. This is why an elective king never possesses the moral power of a hereditary *sovereign*, because he is not *noble* enough, that is to say he does not possess that kind of greatness independent of men and that is the work of time.

In England, it is not the Parliament that made the king, nor the king that made the Parliament. These two powers are collateral: they established themselves we know not when nor how, and the insensible

[15] [In Homer's *Iliad*, Thersites was a deformed and scurrilous officer in the Greek army who was finally killed by Achilles.]

[16] Tacitus *Histories* 1.56. [John Jackson translates these lines as: "There was less danger ... in accepting an emperor than in looking for one." Loeb Classical Library 1962.]

and powerful sanction of opinion has finally made them what they are.[17]

Take any republican government you like; ordinarily you will find a great Council in which sovereignty, properly speaking, resides. Who established this Council? Nature, time, circumstances – that is to say, God. Several men have been put in their place, as elsewhere a single man has been put in his place. This country required a sovereignty divided among several heads, and because this was what was necessary, it was so established. That is all that we know.

Since the general deliberations, intrigues, and interminable delays that are the consequence of a numerous sovereign Council do not accord with the secret, prompt, and vigorous measures of a well--organized government, the force of things would still require the establishment of some other different power; and you will always find this necessary power somewhere in these sorts of governments, without being able to assign it an origin. In a word, the mass of the people counts for nothing in every political creation. A people even respects a government only because it is not its own creation. This feeling is engraved on its heart in profound characters. It submits to sovereignty because it senses that it is something sacred it can neither create nor destroy. If, as a consequence of corruption and perfidious suggestions, this preventive sentiment is somehow effaced, if it has the misfortune of believing itself called as a body to reform the State, all is lost. This is why, even in free States, it is extremely important that the men who govern be separated from the mass of the people by that personal respect stemming from birth and wealth; for if opinion does not put a barrier between the people and authority, if power is not placed beyond its ken, if the governed many can believe themselves equal to the small

[17] The truth can even be found in the tribune of the Jacobins. Félix Lepelletier, one of them, said, on 5 February 1794, in speaking of the government of England: "The members of the *very high* Chamber hold their titles and their powers from the king; those of the *very low* Chamber received theirs from the cities or communities where only one class of privileged individuals have the right of suffrage. The mass of the people had no part in the creation of the realm in England nor in the actual organization of the Parliament." (See the *Moniteur*, 1794, n° 137.)

The honourable member was wrong to confuse the *peers* with the *peerage*, which holds neither its existence nor its rights from the king; he was wrong to confuse *representatives* with *representation*, which is owed to no one, any more than the peerage. Apart from this, he is right. No, undoubtedly, the English government (no more than others) is not at all the work of the people; and the criminal or extravagant conclusions that the Jacobin orator soon draws from this principle cannot alter this truth.

number who govern, there will be no more government. In summary, the aristocracy is sovereign or ruling by nature; and the principle of the French Revolution goes against of the eternal laws of nature.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Weakness of Human Power

In all political or religious creations, whatever their object or their importance, it is a general rule that there is never any proportion between effect and cause. The effect is always immense in relation to the cause, so that man knows that he is only an instrument, and that of himself he can create nothing.

The French *National Assembly*, which had the culpable foolishness to call itself *Constituent*, observing that all the legislators in the world had decorated the frontispiece of their laws with a solemn homage to the Divinity, believed itself forced to make its own profession of faith. I do not know what mechanical movement of expiring conscience tore these shabby lines from the would-be French legislators:[1]

The National Assembly recognizes, in the *presence and under the auspices* of the Supreme Being, etc.[2]

In the presence, undoubtedly, to their misfortune; but *under the auspices* – what insanity! God does not choose a turbulent multitude, agitated by vile and frenzied passions, to be the instrument of his wishes in the exercise of the greatest act of his power on earth: the

[1] Constitution of 1789. Preamble to the Declaration of the Rights of Man. [The final phrase of the preamble of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen of 26 August 1789 reads: "In consequence, the National Assembly recognizes and declares, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of man and the citizen." This declaration was subsequently placed at the beginning of the Constitution of 3 September 1791 and not that of 1789, as Maistre's note seems to suggest. (Darcel ed.)]

[2] When we speak of the *National Assembly*, it is scarcely necessary to recall that it is always necessary to make an exception for the respectable minority whose sane principles and inflexible resistance merited the admiration and respect of the whole world.

political organization of nations. Wherever men come together and get very excited, wherever their power is deployed with noise and pretension, there creative power will not be found: *non in commotione Dominus.*[3] This power is announced only by the "gentle air."[4] Recently people have much repeated that liberty is *born* amidst storms. Never, never. It defends itself, it strenthens itself during storms, but it is *born* in silence, peace, and obscurity. Often, even the father of a constitution does not know what he is doing in creating it; but succeeding centuries attest to his mission. It was Aemilius-Paulus and Cato [the Elder] who proclaimed Numa's greatness.[5]

The more human reason trusts in itself, the more it seeks all its resources from within itself, the more absurd it is and the more it reveals its impotence. This is why, in every century, the world's greatest scourge has always been what is called *Philosophy*, for Philosophy is nothing but human reason acting alone, and human reason reduced to its own resources is nothing but a brute, all of whose power is restricted to destruction.

An elegant historian of antiquity made a remarkable observation about what were called in his time, as in ours, philosophers. "I would be foolish," he said, "if I looked to philosophy as man's mistress and the rule of a happy life; on the contrary, I see that its disciples are the men most in need of masters to guide them; they are wonderful for discoursing about all the virtues in the midst of a school, but they are no less plunged into all kinds of vice."[6]

[3] 3 Kings 19:11. ["The Lord is not in the wind."]

[4] Ibid., 12.

[5] [Numa was the second king of Rome; Aemilius-Paulus and Cato were later statesmen and writers who praised Numa as a way of stressing venerable Roman traditions.]

[6] "I am so far away from thinking that philosophy is the mistress of life and the prefectrix of a happy life, that I think that teachers of living are necessary to none more than to most of those who are engaged in discussing these matters. For I see that a great portion of those who in school give instruction and precepts most eloquently about modesty and continence themselves live in the passionate fulfillment of all their desires." (Cornelius Nepos, fragment, from Lactantius *Divine Institutes* [3].15.10.) [Trans. Sister Mary Francis McDonald, OP, Washington: Catholic University of America Press 1964.]

When Julian *the Philosopher*[7] called his colleagues to the court, he made it a sewer. The good Tillemont,[8] writing the history of this prince, entitled one of his chapters this way: "The court of Julian filled with philosophers and condemned men"; and Gibbon, who is not suspect, naively observed that "it is awkward not be able to contradict the accuracy of this title."

Frederick II, a philosopher in spite of himself, who paid these people to praise him, but who knew them well, did not think any better of them, and good sense forced him to say what everyone knows, that "*if he wanted to lose an empire, he would have it governed by philosophers.*"

So it was not a theological exaggeration, but a simple truth vigorously expressed, that one of our prelates, who happily died while he could still believe in the renewal of things, stated: "In its pride, philosophy said: '*To me belongs wisdom, knowledge and dominion; to me belongs the conduct of men, since it is I who enlightens them.*' To punish it, to cover it with opprobrium, God needed only to condemn it to reign for a moment."[9]

Indeed, it has reigned over one the most powerful nations in the world; undoubtedly it will reign long enough that it will not be able to complain that it lacked time. Never has there been a more deplorable example of the absolute nullity of human reason reduced to its own resources. What kind of spectacle have the French legislators given us? Aided by all human knowledge, by the teachings of all philosophers both ancient and modern, and by the experience of centuries, masters of opinion, disposing of immense treasures, having accomplices everywhere, in a word, fortified with all human power, they spoke in their own name. The world is witness to the result; never has human pride disposed of greater means, and, forgetting its crimes for a moment, never has it been more ridiculous.

[7] [Maistre's ironic appellation for the Roman emperor Flavius Claudius Julianus (331–363), who was traditionally called Julian the Apostate because of his repudiation of Christianity and his attempt to reinstate paganism.]

[8] [Sébastien Le Nain de Tillemont (1637–1698), author of *Histoire des empereurs et des autres princes qui ont régné durant les six premiers siècles de l'Eglise* (1690–1738), 6 volumes, and *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique des six premiers siècles* (1693–1712), 16 volumes. (Darcel ed.)]

[9] [This same passage appears in the manuscript of Maistre's "Discours à Madame la Marquise de Costa." Maistre family archives. There Maistre identifies the source as the Archbishop of Tarentaise in a communication to his people dated 28 April 1793.]

Our contemporaries will believe it if they wish, but posterity will not doubt that the most insane men were those who sat around a table and said: "We will take their old Constitution from the French people, and we will give them another" (this one or that one, does not matter). Although this ridiculous idea was common to all the parties that have ravaged France, nevertheless the Jacobins especially come to mind as destroyers rather than builders, and they leave in the imagination a certain impression of grandeur that is the result of the immensity of their success. One can even doubt that they seriously planned to organize France itself as a republic, since the republican constitution that they fabricated was only a kind of comedy enacted for the people to distract them for a moment, and I do not think that the least enlightened of its authors could have believed in it for an instant.

The men who appeared on the scene in the first days of the Constituent Assembly, however, really believed themselves to be legislators. They very seriously and very obviously had the ambition to give France a political constitution, and they believed that an assembly could decide, by majority vote, that a nation would no longer have a particular government and that it would have another. Now, this idea is the *maximum* of extravagance, and nothing equal to it has ever emerged from all the *bedlams*[10] in the world. So these men produce only the impression of weakness, ignorance, and *disappointment*. No feeling of admiration or terror can equal the type of angry pity that the constituent *bedlam* inspires. The prize for villainy belongs by right to the Jacobins, but posterity, with one common voice, will award that for folly to the Constitutionals.

True legislators have all sensed that human reason could not stand alone, and that no purely human institution could last. This is why they interlaced, if it may be put this way, politics and religion, so that human weakness, strengthened by a supernatural support, could be sustained by it. Rousseau admired the Judaic law and that of the child of Ishmael, which have lasted so many centuries. The authors of these two celebrated institutions were at the same time pontiffs and legislators; in the Koran as in the Bible, politics is divinized, and human reason, crushed by the religious ascendancy, cannot insinuate its isolating and corrosive poison into the mechanisms of government, so that citizens are believers whose loyalty is exalted to faith, and obedience to enthusiasm and fanaticism.

[10] [Maistre used the English word *bedlam*, which was the popular name of the Hospital of St Mary of Bethlehem, an insane asylum in London.]

Great political institutions achieve perfection and durability proportionate to the closeness of the union of politics and religion within them. Lycurgus distinguished himself on this fundamental point, and everyone knows that few institutions can be compared to his for duration or wisdom. He imagined nothing, he proposed nothing, he ordered nothing, except on the faith of oracles. All his laws were, so to say, religious precepts; through him the Divinity intervened in the councils, in treaties, in war, and in the administration of justice, to the point that "the government of Sparta seemed not to be a political organization, but rather the rule of some devout and holy religion."[11] So, when Lysander wanted to destroy the Spartan monarchy, he first tried to corrupt the priests who reported the oracles, because he knew that the Lacedemonians would do nothing important without having consulted those oracles.[12]

The Romans offer another example of this force that the religious bond introduces into politics. Everyone knows the famous passage from Cicero where he says that the Romans had superiors in everything, except in the fear and cult of the Gods.

"Let us flatter ouselves," he said, "as much as we please: we will never surpass the Greeks in science, the Spaniards in numbers, the Gauls in courage, etc.; but in religion and respect for the immortal gods, we have no equal." Numa gave to Roman political life that religious character that was the sap, the soul, the life of the Republic, and that perished with it. It is an acknowledged fact, among all educated men, that the oath was the real cement of the Roman constitution; it was the oath that made the most turbulent plebeian, lowering his head before the consul who asked his name, display under the flags the docility of a child. Livy, who saw the birth of philosophy and the death of the Republic (it was the same period), sometimes yearned for those happy times when religion had assured the happiness of the state. At the point where he tells the history of that young man who came to warn the consul of a fraud committed by the inspector of the sacred fowl, he added: "This young man was born before the doctrine that despised the gods."[13]

[11] Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus*, Chap. 62 of the Amyot translation.

[12] "...he plotted to abolish the royal power at Lacedaemon. He was aware, however, that success was impossible without the help of the Gods, since it was the custom of the Lacedaemoneians to consult the oracles on all matters of state." (Cornelius Nepos *Lysander* 3.) [Trans. John C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 1947.]

[13] Livy *On the Founding of the City* 10.40.

It was in their assemblies, especially, that the Romans manifested the religious character of their legislation. The assemblies of the people could only take place in the presence of a presiding magistrate who had taken the *Auspices*. Their scruples in this matter were endless, and the power of the *Augurs* was such that they had been known to annul the deliberations of assemblies several months after the date;[14] with the famous phrase *alio die*[15] the *augur* would break up any assembly of the people.[16] Every magistrate superior or equal to the one who presided at the assemblies also had the right to take Auspices. If he declared that *he had observed the sky (se de cœlo servasse)*[17] and that he had seen a flash of lightening or heard thunder,[18] the assemblies were dismissed.

It was in vain that *abuses* were feared, that they were even palpable on certain occasions.

It was in vain that the least clear-sighted plebeian saw in the doctrine of the augurs an unfailing arm in the hands of the aristocracy to fetter the projects and deliberations of the people; the impetuosity of party spirit slackened in the face of respect for the Divinity. The magistrate was believed *even when he had forged the auspices*,[19] because it was thought that an object of this importance had to be left to the conscience of the magistrate, and that it was better to be exposed to being deceived than to offend religious customs.

In the same century when it was written that *one augur could scarcely look at another without laughing*, Cicero, whom a plotter had flattered by inveigling the office of augur for him, wrote to his friend: *I admit it, only that could have tempted me*.[20] So much was the consideration attached to this kind of priesthood profoundly rooted in the Roman imagination.

[14] Cicero *The Nature of the Gods* 2, 4.

[15] [This expression is found in Cicero *Philippics* 2.83. (Darcel ed.)]

[16] Cicero *On Divination* 2.12.

[17] [Cicero *Philippics* 2.23.]

[18] *Jove fulgente cum populo agi nefas esse*, Cicero *Cross-examination of Vatinius* 8; *On Divination* 2.18; [Alexander] Adam's *Roman Antiquities* (Edinburgh 1792), p. 99. [The Latin formula appears with slight variations in the two citations from Cicero. Translation of the first: "When Jupiter lightens, it is sacrilege to transact business with the people." Trans. R. Gardner, Loeb Classical Library 1958. (Darcel ed.)]

[19] *Etiam si auspicia ementitus esset*, Cicero *Philippics* 2.23. [Incorrect reference. In fact, *Philippics* 2.33. (Darcel ed.)]

[20] *Letters to Atticus*.

It would be useless to repeat here what has been said a thousand times, and to show what the Roman religion had in common with that of other nations; however religion among these people had characteristics that distinguished it from others and that it is worthwhile noticing.

The Roman legislator or magistrate in the *Forum* was, so to say, surrounded by the idea of the Divinity, and this idea also followed him into the military camp. I doubt whether it would have occurred to another people to make the principle feature of a camp a veritable temple where military symbols were mixed with statues of the gods become veritable divinities and changed these trophies into altars.

This is what the Romans did. It is impossible to describe the respect with which opinion surrounded the praetorium of a camp (*principia*). The eagles, the flags, and the images of the gods all reposed there. The general's tent was found there; there the laws were proclaimed; there they held council; and there they gave the signal for battle. Roman writers only spoke of this place with a certain religious veneration,[21] and for them violation of the praetorium was a sacrilege. Tacitus, recounting the revolt of two legions near Cologne, said that Plancus, sent by the emperor and the senate to the mutinous legions, and on the point of being massacred, found no other way of saving his life than to embrace the eagles and flags *to place himself under the aegis of religion.*[22] Then he adds: "If the flag-bearer Calpurnius had not opposed the rioters, the blood of an envoy of the Roman people would have been seen soiling the altars of the gods in a Roman camp."[23]

The more one studies history, the more one will be convinced of this indispensable alliance between politics and religion.[24]

[21] Statius calls it: "the inner-council chamber and the *revered home of the standards.*". (Statius *[Thebiad]* 10.176.) [Trans. J.H. Mozley, Loeb Classical Library 1957]

[22] "They ... contemplated murder; especially in the case of Plancus. ... Nor in his extremity had he any refuge but the quarters of the first legion. There, clasping the standards and the eagle, he lay in sanctuary." (Tacitus *Annals* 1.39.4.) [Trans. John Jackson, Loeb Classical Library 1951.]

[23] "...and had not the eagle-bearer Calpurnius shielded him from the crowning violence, then ... an ambassador of the Roman people would in a Roman camp have defiled with his blood the altars of heaven." (Ibid., 1.39.4.) [Loeb.]

[24] [Crossed out manuscript paragraph: "*The philosophes are curious on this article as on so many others; sometimes they complain of the league between empire and the priesthood, and sometimes they complain of the struggle between these two powers.* They wrote books to establish that priests are the accomplices of despotism, that without them this monster would have no hold on mankind, and that they work unceasingly to close men's eyes in order to deliver them tied and bound

Abuses in this matter mean nothing; we must be prudent when reasoning about the abuse of necessary things, and take care not to entice men to destroy the thing for the sake of eliminating the abuse, without dreaming that this word *abuse* means only the disordered use of a good thing that must be preserved. However I must not go any further in the examination of a question that would take me too far.

I only wanted to demonstrate that human reason, or what is called philosophy, is as useless for the happiness of states as for that of individuals, that all great institutions have their origins and their conservation elsewhere, and that when human reason is mingled with such institutions, it only perverts or destroys them.

to the tyrant. They have also written books to prove that the priests are the greatest enemies of sovereignty, that everywhere, if people have the misfortune to believe in their sacred character, they substitute themselves for the sovereign and tie his hands, so that they are accused of being at one and the very same time enemies of sovereignty and supporters of tyranny. The more legislators were wise, the more they took account of this perfect amalgam." (Darcel ed.)]

CHAPTER NINE

Continuation of the Same Subject

Paine, in his bad book on the rights of man, said that "the constitution precedes the government, that it is to government what the laws are to the courts; that it must be visible, material, article by article, or else it does not exist; so that the English people do not have a constitution, its government being the fruit of conquest, and not the result of the will of the people."[1]

It would be difficult to accumulate more mistakes in fewer lines. Not only can a nation not give itself a constitution, but no assembly, a small number of men in relation to the total population, could ever carry out such a work. It is precisely because there was in France an all powerful *Convention* that wanted a Republic that there will not be a republic. The tower of Babel is the naive image of a crowd of men assembled to create a constitution. "Come, said the CHILDREN OF MEN, let us make a city and a tower, the top whereof may reach to heaven. And let us make our name famous lest we be scattered abroad into all the lands."[2]

But the work was called *Babel*, this is to say *confusion*; each spoke *his language*; no one understood each other, and *dispersion* was inevitable.

There has never been, there will never be, and there cannot be a nation constituted *a priori*. Reason and experience join to establish this great truth. What eye is capable of taking in at a glance the totality of circumstances that fit a nation for a particular constitution? How especially could several men be capable of such an effort of intelli-

[1] [Thomas] Paine, *The Rights of Man* (London 1791), p. 57. [What Maistre has provided is not an actual citation from Paine, but rather his own summary of Paine's constitutional ideas.]

[2] Genesis 11:4. [Douay.]

gence? Unless we voluntarily blind ourselves, we must agree that this is impossible, and here history, which must decide all these questions, again comes to the support of theory. A small number of free nations have shone in history; but none can be shown to have been constituted Paine's way. Every particular form of government is a divine work, just like sovereignty in general. A constitution in the philosophical sense is therefore only the mode of political existence attributed to each nation by a higher power; and, in an inferior sense, a constitution is only the assemblage of more or less numerous laws that declare this mode of existence. Moreover these laws are not necessary;[3] it is precisely to these constitutional laws that the axiom of Tacitus applies most particularly: *Pessimæ reipublicæ plurimæ leges.*[4] The wiser nations are, the more public spirit they possess, the more perfect their political constitution, the fewer constitutional laws they have, for these laws are only props, and a building only needs props when it has become out of plumb or when it has been violently shaken by an external force. The most perfect constitution of antiquity was without contradiction that of Sparta, and Sparta has not left us a single line of its public law. It justly boasted of having written its laws only in the hearts of its children. Read the history of Roman laws, I mean those that belong to its public law.[5] You will notice first that the real roots of the Roman Constitution were not written laws. Where is the law that fixed the respective rights of the king, the patricians, and the people? Where is the law, that after the expulsion of the kings, divided power between the senate and the people, assigning to the one and to the other its just portion of sovereignty, and that gave to the consuls, the successors to the kings, the precise limits of executive power that they came to take on? You will find nothing like this.

In the second place, you will see that you will find almost no laws in the earliest days of the Republic, and laws only multiplied as the state leaned towards ruin.

[3] [The 1870 edition reads: "It is not at all necessary that these laws be written." (Darcel ed.)]

[4] ["The worst republics have the most laws." Maistre has slightly altered the passage, which reads: *Corruptissima re publica plurimae leges.* "When the state was most corrupt, laws were most abundant." *Annals* 3.27. Loeb.]

[5] Gian Vincenzo Gravina, *Origines juris civilis* [Leipzig 1708]; [Joannes] Rosinus, *Antiquitatum Romanarum Corpus [Absolutissimum],* with notes by Thomas Demster [Amsterdam: Blaen 1685]; and [Alexander] Adam, *Roman Antiquities* [Edinburgh 1791], p. 191ff.

Two powers were present: the senate and the people. These two powers were placed there by what is called *nature*; this is all we can know about the original bases of the Roman constitution.

If, at the time of the expulsion of the Tarquins, these two powers together had put another hereditary king on the throne with whom they had specified the maintenance of their constitutional rights, the Roman Constitution, according to all the rules of probability, should have lasted much longer; the annual consuls did not have the power to maintain the equilibrium. When sovereignty is divided between two powers, the *balancing* of these two powers is necessarily a *combat*; if you introduced a third power provided with the necessary strength, it will immediately establish a tranquil equilibrium by quietly supporting sometimes the one side and sometimes the other. This, by the nature of things, is what could not take place at Rome. So it was always by alternate shocks that the two powers maintained themselves, and the whole history of Rome presents the spectacle of vigorous athletes who clutch and roll each other, in turn crushing and being crushed.

These different shocks required laws, not to establish new bases for the Constitution, but to maintain the ancient ones alternately shaken by two different ambitions; and if the two parties had been wiser or content with sufficient power, these laws would not have been necessary.

Let us come back to England. Its written freedoms can be reduced to six articles: 1. Magna Carta; 2. the statute called *Confirmatio chartarum*; 3. the *Petition of Rights*, which is a Parliamentary declaration, confirmed by Charles I at his accession to the throne, of all the rights of the English people; 4. *Habeas corpus*; 5. the Bill of Rights presented to William and Mary on their arrival in England, and to which Parliament gave the force of law on 13 February 1688; 6. finally, the act passed at the beginning of this century and known under the name of the Act of *Settlement*, because it fixed the throne in the reigning house – the civil and religious freedoms of England are there newly consecrated.[6]

It is not in virtue of these laws that England is free; on the contrary, it possesses these laws because it is free. Only a people born for liberty

[6] See Blackstone's *Commentary on the civil and criminal laws of England*, chap. I. [William Blackstone (1723–1780) was a distinguished English jurist; his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (Oxford 1768–69) was well known, with translations into a number of languages. Maistre used an English edition. (Darcel ed.)]

could have demanded Magna Carta, and Magna Carta would be useless to a people alien to liberty.

"Our constitution," a member of the Commons, in a session of the Parliament of England on 10 May 1793, said very well, "was not the result of an assembly: it was the offspring of experience. Our ancestors only had an eye to those theories which could be reduced to practice. The Constitution was not formed at once, it was the work of time; it emerged from a concurrence of circumstances, from a collision of parties, and contention for power."[7] Nothing is truer, and these truths pertain not only to England; they apply to all nations and to all the political constitutions in the world.

What Paine and so many others regard as a fault is therefore a law of nature. The *natural* constitution of any nation is always prior to its *written* constitution, and can dispense with it. Never has there been and never can there be a written constitution made all at once, especially by an assembly; and the very fact that it was written all at once would prove that it is false and unworkable. Every constitution is properly speaking a *creation* in the full meaning of the term, and all *creation* surpasses the powers of man. Written law is only the declaration of prior and non-written law. Man cannot give rights to himself, and he can only defend those attributed to him by a superior power, and these rights are *good customs*, good because they are not written, and because they can be assigned neither a beginning nor an author.

Let us take an example from religion. The *canons*, which are also in their way exceptional laws, cannot create dogmas, since a dogma would be false precisely because it was new. The very people who believe that they can innovate in a true religion would be forced to agree that it would be necessary for the dogma or the belief to precede the canon; otherwise a universal outcry would refute the innovators. A *canon* or *written dogma* is produced by *heresy*, which is a religious insurrection. If the belief is not attacked, it would be useless to declare it.

In the same way, men create nothing in the matter of government. Every written constitutional law is only a declaration of a prior right or a *political dogma*, and it is never produced except in response to the opposition of a party that misunderstands this right or attacks it. It follows that a law that claims to establish a new form of government *a priori* is an extravagant act in the full meaning of the phrase.

[7] Mr. Grey. See the *Craftsman*, no. 1746.

CHAPTER TEN

Of the National Soul

Human reason reduced to its own resources is perfectly worthless, not only for creating but also for preserving any political or religious association, because it only produces disputes, and, to conduct himself well, man needs not problems but beliefs. His cradle should be surrounded by dogmas, and when his reason is awakened, it should find all his opinions ready-made, at least all those relating to his conduct. Nothing is so important to him as *prejudices*. Let us not take this word in a bad sense. It does not necessarily mean false ideas, but only, in the strict sense of the word, opinions adopted before any examination. Now these sorts of opinions are man's greatest need, the true elements of his happiness, and the Palladium of empires. Without them, there can be neither worship, nor morality, nor government. There must be a state religion just as there is a state policy; or, rather, religious and political dogmas must be merged and mingled together to form a complete *common* or *national reason* strong enough to repress the aberrations of individual reason, which of its nature is the mortal enemy of any association whatever because it produces only divergent opinions.

All known nations have been happy and powerful to the extent that they have more faithfully obeyed this national reason, which is nothing other than the annihilation of individual dogmas and the absolute and general reign of national dogmas, that is to say, of useful prejudices. Let each man call upon his individual reason in the matter of religion, and immediately you will see the birth of an anarchy of belief or the annihilation of religious sovereignty. Likewise, if each man makes himself judge of the principles of government, you will at once see the birth of civil anarchy or the annihilation of political sovereignty. Government is a true religion: it has its dogmas, its mysteries, and its ministers. To annihilate it or submit it to the discussion of each individual is the same thing; it lives only through national reason, that is to say through political faith, which is a *creed*. Man's first need is

that his nascent reason be curbed under this double yoke, that it be abased and lose itself in the national reason, so that it changes its individual existence into another common existence, just as a river that flows into the ocean always continues to exist in the mass of water, but without a name and without a distinct reality.[1]

What is *patriotism*? It is this national reason of which I am speaking, it is individual *abnegation*. Faith and patriotism are the two great thaumaturges of this world. Both are divine; all their actions are prodigies. Do not go to them talking of examination, choice, or discussion; they will say that you blaspheme. They know only two words: *submission* and *belief*; with these two levers they raise the world. Even their errors are sublime. These two children of Heaven prove their origin to all eyes by creating and conserving; but if they unite, join their forces, and together take possession of a nation, they exalt it, they divinize it, and they increase its forces a hundred-fold. You will see a nation of five or six million men build on the sterile rocks of Judea the most magnificent city in magnificent Asia,[2] resist shocks that would have pulverized nations ten times more numerous, brave the torrent of centuries, the sword of conquerors, and the hate of nations, astonish the masters of the world by its resistance,[3] survive finally all the conquering nations, and after forty centuries still show its woeful remains to the eyes of surprised observers.

You will see another people coming from the deserts of Arabia, to become in a blink of the eye a prodigious colossus, spreading over the world, a scimitar in one hand and the Koran in the other, shattering empires on its triumphal march, and redeeming the evils of war by its institutions; great, generous, and sublime, shining by both reason and imagination, bearing sciences, arts, and poetry amidst the night of the middle ages; and from the Euphrates to the Guadalquivir, twenty

[1] Rousseau said that one must not speak to children of religion and that it is necessary to place on their reason the responsibility of choosing one. One can put this maxim beside another of his maxims: "The constitution of man is the work of nature; that of the State is a work of art." (*Contrat social* [Bk. III, chap. xi. *CW*, 4:188]). It requires nothing more than this to establish that this Jean-Jacques, so superficial under a vain appearance of depth, had not the least idea of human nature and the real bases of politics.

[2] "Jerusalem, by far the most famous city of the East, and not of Judea only." Pliny *Natural History* 5.15. [Trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 1947.]

[3] Josephus *History of the Jewish War* 6.9.

prostrate nations lowering their heads under the peaceable sceptre of Harun al Rashid.[4]

This sacred fire that animates nations, can you, imperceptible man, light it? What! Can you give a common soul to several million men? What! Can you create one will from all these wills? Unite them under your laws? Bind them around a common centre? Instil your thoughts into men yet unborn? Make future generations obey you and create those venerable customs, those conserving *prejudices*, that are the father of the laws and stronger than laws? Keep quiet.

[4] [Harun al Rashid (766–809) was the greatest of the Abbasid caliphs; he made his capital at Bagdad the richest and most cultivated city of its day in the Mediterranean world. (Darcel ed.)]

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Application of the Preceding Principles to a Particular Case

Recently, the National Convention treated the great question of public education. The chairman, speaking in the name of Committee on Public Instruction, said to the would-be legislators, at their session of 24 October 1794:

Turgot often wished to have absolute power for a year in order to realize all that he had conceived in favour of reason, freedom, and humanity, without obstacles and without delay.

You lack nothing that Turgot had, and you have everything he lacked. The resolution that you are going to take will be an epoch in the history of the world.[1]

They have already said many bad things about Turgot in the belief that they were saying good things. This wish to possess absolute power *for a year* in order bring about *without obstacles and without delay* the prodigies that he had imagined, this wish, I say, could undoubtedly have come from an excellent heart; but it also undoubtedly announces a head radically spoiled by philosophy. If he had possessed the power that he wanted, he would only have built a house of cards, and his extravagant work would have lasted no longer than he did.

However let us leave Turgot and think only of the National Convention. There they are, invested with all power. The issue is the establishment of a system of national education. The ground before the legislators is clear; nothing impedes them. Let us see how they do it. It is too bad that the Jacobins had been destroyed; by this false move, the National Convention deprived itself of powerful co-operators, for they too, *in their wisdom*, occupied themselves with national education,

[1] Lakanal, in the name of the Committee on Public Instruction. (*Moniteur*, 1794, no. 37, p. 165.)

and God knows what marvels they would have produced! On 24 October 1794, an orator of this society said of education: "In directing all the members of the society towards the desire to make themselves happy one by another, we will succeed in forming A NATION OF GODS."[2]

We must admit that we have been quite close to happiness: for Rousseau having decided that a Republic such as he conceived it was made only for *a people of gods*,[3] and this government however being the only lawful form of government, since legitimate monarchy is itself a Republic,[4] it unfortunately follows that the Jacobins no longer being there to form a *nation of gods*, one must renounce the prospect of seeing a legitimate government.

For the rest, even if the National Convention would only be made up of *angels*, this would be a lot, and I believe it would be wrong to ask more; it only remains to see how they will set about it.

First we could notice that this important work was not begun under happy auspices. The two chairmen had hardly begun the exposition of their project, when fathers of families were crying in the rostrums: "Before teaching us how our children are to raised, we must know how we will give them bread."[5]

No doubt it would be hard to base a judgement on what might only be an outburst of passing bad humour. So let us examine the plans of the National Convention.

These plans are quite simple. "You will have as many masters as will be required; they will teach your children what you wish, and you will give them so much per year." There is the whole secret; but we must enter into the details to form an idea of such a great enterprise.

They noted that a population of 1,000 persons gives 100 children, 50 of each sex. Twenty-four million men therefore require 24,000 male teachers and as many female teachers. They will give the first a salary of 1,200 francs, and only 1,000 to the second.[6]

These teachers of both sexes need to be lodged; but this is easy, since they will give them the old presbyteries become useless since the

[2] Boissel to the Jacobins. (Session of 24 October 1794. *Moniteur*, no. 39, p. 171)

[3] *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. iv. [*CW*, 4:174.]

[4] Ibid., Bk. II, chap. vi, note. [For the text of this note, see note 19 to Bk. II, chap. 4, p. 152 below.]

[5] *Moniteur*, 1794, no. 46, p. 200.

[6] Sessions of 27 October and 15 November 1794. (*Moniteur*, no. 40, p. 178, and no. 57, p. 246.)

august representatives of the *first nation in the world* have solemnly declared that the *French nation pays for no religion.*[7]

In truth, many of these presbyteries were destroyed or sold or used for other purposes, but in these sorts of cases they will buy other buildings, and it is just that the entire nation support these expenses, like those for repairs.[8]

As much as possible, they will house the male and female teachers in the same buildings; where the layout of a presbytery makes this absolutely impossible, it will be necessary to have two buildings.[9]

However all these expenses concern only the primary schools; it is obvious that there must be others where they will teach less elementary knowledge: and in effect in the same session where they examined the plan for primary schools, they insisted strongly on the very pressing question of organizing cantonal schools.[10]

This is not all. The sciences properly speaking will undoubtedly require special instruction. Here is the masterpiece of the legislators. Scientists of the first order will be chosen, in the capital. These will instruct students who will come from the departments to reflect the sacred fire whose hearth is Paris.

The spokesman of the Committee on Public Instruction does not hide the fact that this will be "the Republic's greatest expense in times of peace."[11] So it would be quite desirable to have someone go into the necessary details.

Let us try to supply them: a rough outline will suffice for the purposes of this work.

For 24,000 teachers in the primary schools, at 1,200 fr. per head	28,800,000 fr.
For 24,000 female teachers, at 1,000 fr. per head	24,000,000 fr.

[7] "Already your laws have freed the nation of the enormous expenses of religion." (Cambon, in the name of the Finance Committee. Session of November 1794. *Moniteur*, no. 46, p. 201.) "The government *cannot* adopt, or even less *salary* any religion." (Grégoire, Session of 21 December 1794, *Moniteur*, no. 93, p. 388.)

[8] See the sessions cited in the first note on this topic.

[9] Ibid.

[10] *Moniteur*, no. 58, p. 250.

[11] Session of 24 October 1794. (*Moniteur*, no. 40, p. 178.)

For 24,000 school buildings, it would first be necessary to calculate the full number of complete reconstructions required at one time or another because of age or violent causes; but not to be too detailed, and taking into account only the annual repairs to each house at 100 fr. each, and adding to this sum the cost of reconstructions for 24,000 buildings, we get 2,400,000 fr.

For the cantonal schools, let us count ten municipalities per canton; this, I think, is all that one can allot. So, France having 42,000 municipalities,[12] we will have 4,200 teachers; and the importance of their duties requiring a higher salary, let us grant them 1,800 fr. each 7,500,000 fr.

And since female instructors for the canton will also be required for persons of this sex to which their parents could and would want to send their children for more advanced instruction, let us grant these teachers 1,500 fr. each 6,300,000 fr.

For repairs for the 4,200 buildings that I suppose will have to be a little more decorated, on the basis of 200 fr. per year, taking the same considerations into account ... 840,000 fr.

As for the normal schools, let us place one of them in the chief town of each department: one could not make a lesser supposition unless one wanted to concentrate all instruction in the capital, which would make the institution almost useless. Let us prune away all French conquests to keep the stakes lower. We do not have certain bases for the number of professors; but finally, either the normal schools will be nothing or they will have at least one professor of mathematics, one of chemistry, one of anatomy, and one of medicine. I could add French law, learned languages, veterinary medicine, etc., but I limit myself to what is strictly necessary.

[12] One could make an even higher estimate, since the Finance Committee allowed France 50,000 parishes. (Cambon, in the name of the Committee. Session of 2 November. *Moniteur*, no. 45, p. 195.)

The Committee of Eleven, which just proposed a fourth perfect constitution to the National Assembly, allowed 44,000 municipalities (*Journal de Paris* of 24 June 1795); but it is possible to overdo accuracy.

Six normal school professors multiplied by 83, the supposed number of departments, give 498; and not being able to allot less than 3,000 fr. salary for such distinguished scholars as we suppose them to be ...	1,494,000 fr.
For repairs for the 83 normal school buildings, which must necessarily be handsome edifices, let us allot 400 fr. per year for each of these houses, including redecoration, etc. ...	332,000 fr.
Total!!!	71,666,000 fr.

Such is the rough outline of the government's proposed expenses. Let us add a few observations.

1. Many presbyteries have been sold or employed for uses indispensable to the new regime, or destroyed by the furies of blind and frenetic people; it will be necessary to supply this *deficit*, and this will be an enormous expense.

2. The meanness of presbyteries is well known; many of these buildings will not be capable of housing two schools. It will be necessary to find a second building.

3. The best of these buildings being mediocre enough, the male and female instructors, as well as the young people of both sexes, will be pretty much pell-mell; and since primary education could extend up to 15 or 16 years of age, and even longer, if they are slow in organizing cantonal schools, the primary schools will soon be *public houses* in all the meanings of the term.

4. The Committee on Public Instruction considered the population of France en mass and without any distinction. However equity demands that we distinguish the population of the cities from that of the country side. Paris, for example, will have 600 professors and as many primary school teachers. If the sum of 1,200 fr. suffices for a village, clearly it will not suffice in Paris, nor even in a city of the second or third order – a new very considerable increase in expenses.

5. When governments organize machines as complicated as those in question here, the sharpest eye cannot have a clear idea of the expenses that will be required. They see only the principal expenses, but soon the *molti pochi* of the Italian proverb will appear everywhere, and they will be quite surprised to see the expenses double. This is especially

true at a time when *all the public officials are asking for an increase in salaries.*[13]

6. However, will this frightful expense, which surpasses the revenues of five or six crowned heads, at least provide the French with a national education? Not at all, for despite the complaints of some Jacobins who did not have the means to be heard, the parents will still be free to educate their children at home or elsewhere as they judge convenient. Soon, in the dictionary of the vainest nation in the world, the primary schools, despised like dirt, will be stigmatized by some epithet that will chase away what will always be called *good company*, despite *freedom* and *equality*; decency itself and morals will unite with vanity to vilify *national education* in public opinion, and this whole great institution will be only a big joke.

To this portrait, which is in no way exaggerated or chimerical, and whose suppositions have been made most favourable to the philosophical *great work*, I oppose another whose comparison appears striking to me.

Everyone has heard about the Jesuits, and a large portion of the present generation has seen them; they would still subsist if some governments had not allowed themselves to be influenced by the enemies of this extraordinary Order, which was certainly a very great mistake. However, we must not be astonished that old men on the eve of their death talk drivel.

Ignatius of Loyola, a simple Spanish gentleman, a soldier without fortune or education, pushed by an interior movement of religion, resolved in the sixteenth century to establish an Order devoted entirely to the education of youth and the extirpation of the heresies that were pulling the Church to pieces at that time. He willed this with the creative will for which nothing is impossible; he then found ten men who willed like him, and these ten men accomplished what we have seen.

Considering this Order's Constitution only as political handiwork, it is, in my opinion, one of the most beautiful conceptions that the human mind can boast. No founder better attained his goal, none succeeded more perfectly in the annihilation of particular wills to establish the general will and that *common reason* that is the generative and conserving principle of all institutions whatever, large or small. For *esprit de corps* is only diminished *public spirit*, as patriotism is only enlarged *esprit de corps*.

[13] Cambon, in the name of the Finance Committee. (Session of 19 October 1794. *Moniteur*, no. 32, p. 142.)

If we want to form an idea of the interior strength, activity, and influence of this Order, it suffices to reflect on the implacable and really furious hatred by which it was subsequently honoured by philosophism and its eldest son presbyterianism; for these two enemies of Europe were precisely those of the Jesuits, who fought them right to the end with a vigour and a perseverance that are without equal.

From Bellarmine,[14] whom a robust Protestant of the last century agreeably called "the luscious favorite of the frightful Roman beast,"[15] to Father Berthier,[16] the great flagellator of the Encyclopedists, the combat between the Jesuits and innovators of all kinds never relented for a moment. One will not find an institution that better fulfilled its goal.

On this score we can believe Rabaut de Saint-Etienne,[17] fanatical Constituent, *philosophe* in the full sense of the term, a preacher paid by his sect to incite the people of Paris. In the history of the French revolution that he sketched, he speaks of the Jesuits as a power, and intimates that the Revolution is due in great part to the abolition of this Order. "*The most violent,*" he says, "*and the most capable enemies of freedom of writing, the Jesuits, have disappeared; and no one, since, has dared to deploy the same despotism and the same perseverance.*

"*Once the minds of the French were turned towards instructive reading, they turned their attention to the mysteries of government.*"[18]

[14] [St Robert Bellarmine, Jesuit theologian and cardinal, was the most learned controversialist of the Catholic Reformation.]

[15] *Immanis illæ belluæ romanæ delicium bellissimum.* (See Johannes Saubert, *Theol. Doct., de sacrificiis veterum libri.* (Lyon 1699) cap. II, p. 20).

[16] [Guillaume-François Berthier (1704–1782) was a learned Jesuit who became editor of the *Journal de Trevoux* in 1745; his critiques of the philosophes and Encyclopedists are still respected by scholars today. Maistre used and admired his apologetic and ascetic works.]

[17] This is the Rabaut whom Burke condemned to a cold bath for having said, in a discourse to the National Assembly, that it was necessary to destroy everything in France, even names. But Robespierre's Committee, which found this judgement too mild, improved it, as we know. [Burke cited Jean-Paul Rabaut Saint-Etienne (1743–1793) in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in a note to his own comments on the destructive approach of the National Assembly. Saint-Etienne was the son of a Huguenot pastor and himself a pastor at Nîmes. Elected a deputy to the Convention in 1792, he identified himself with the Girondins, and voted for reprieve in the trail of Louis XVI. He was subsequently proscribed and condemned to death with the Girondins.]

[18] *Précis de l'histoire de la Révolution française* (1792) Bk. I, p. 17.

The enemies of *superstition,* like those of *despotism,* have also spoken on this point .

"*Here however,*" wrote Frederick II, "*is a new advantage that we have just won against Spain. The Jesuits have been chased from that kingdom ... What must we not expect from the century that will follow ours? The axe is at the root of the tree. ... The edifice* (of superstition), *sapped in its foundations, is going to collapse.*"[19]

Therefore, the Jesuits were, in the judgement of Frederick II, *the root* of this *tree* and the *foundations* of this *edifice.* What happiness for them!

A Protestant doctor who published, a little while ago, in Germany, a *General History of the Christian Church,* did not think he was exaggerating in affirming that "without the Jesuits, the religious revolution of the sixteenth century would have extended its action much further, and would have ended by finding no other barrier," and that "*if this Order, on the contrary, had existed sooner, there would have been no reform, and perhaps we would have seen the establishment of an insurmountable universal monarchy, unknown to history.*"[20]

Let us pass over this *insurmountable universal monarchy* with a smile. What at least appears infinitely probable is that if the Jesuits had survived to our time, they, alone, would have prevented this Revolution that armed Europe cannot stifle.

It was an ex-Jesuit who, in 1787, prophesied the French Revolution in the most extraordinary way, who named all his enemies to Louis

[19] The King of Prussia to Voltaire. (Voltaire, *Oeuvres,* Kiel ed., 86:248.) The judgements of the King of Prussia on the philosophes are the most curious thing in the world. When he indulged his hatred for Christianity, which was a veritable sickness, a rage, with him, then he spoke of these gentlemen as his colleagues; he made common cause with them, and he said WE. However when the fever had passed and it was no longer a question of theology, he spoke of them and he spoke to them with the utmost scorn; for no one knew them better than he. This observation is justified by all the pages of his correspondence.

[20] See *Allgemeine Geschichte de christlichen Kirche,* by Heinrich-Philipp-Conrad Henke, professor of theology at Helmstadt. Braunsweig, 1794. Bk. II, third part, p. 69.

The professor, in affirming in the same sentence: 1. that the reform would have extended its action further; 2. that it would have ended without finding any barrier, undoubtedly understood that it would have overthrown more dogmas and it would have persuaded everyone. Otherwise, he would have given a palpable tautology. In this supposition, one cannot too much regret that the Jesuits prevented a very great *purification* of Christianity.

XVI, who unfolded all their plots to him with an awful precision, and who finished with these memorable words: "*Sire! Your throne is posed on a volcano.*"[21]

The forever lamentable fate of this unfortunate prince justified this prediction only too well. Louis XVI has been dethroned by philosophism allied to presbyterianism for the destruction of France.

Let us notice too that the spirit of this institution was so strong, so energetic, and so *alive*, that it survived the death of the Order. Like those living animals whose members divided by the physiologist's knife continue to share the life they had in common and present to the astonished eye the phenomena of living nature, the Jesuits, separated members of a disorganized body, reproduced under our eyes all the characteristics of the association: the same firmness in their systems, the same attachment to national dogmas, and the same antipathy for innovators. The horrible persecution undergone by the French clergy this last while has been unable to bend any of these men weakened by age and need. Equally loyal to the Church and to the inhuman government that while taking their millions refused them a subsistence, neither terror nor seduction has had the power to create a single apostate from among them, and the languishing remnants of this marvellous Order could still furnish twenty-one victims in the September 1792 massacre![22]

If it is a question of judging the Jesuits, I will willingly accept the judgement of this same Frederick, writing under the dictate of good sense in one of those moments when humour and prejudices did not influence his judgements:

"Remember, I beg you," he wrote to Voltaire, "Father Tournemine, your nurse, with whom you sucked the sweet milk of the Muses; reconcile yourself with an Order that sustained you and that in the last century furnished France with men of the greatest merit. I know very

[21] See the *Mémoire à lire dans le Conseil du roi sur le projet de donner un état civil aux protestants*, 1787 (last pages). The work is by the ex-Jesuit Bonneau. [The correct names of the author and title are: Jacques-Julien Bonnaud, *Discours à lire au Conseil en présence du roi, par un ministre patriote, sur le projet d'accorder l'état civil aux protestants.* Arrested 10 August 1792 as a counter-revolutionary, Bonnaud was a victim of the September massacres. (Darcel ed.)]

[22] See *Histoire du clergé pendant la Révolution française*, by the Abbé [Augustin] Barruel, chaplain to the Princess de Conti (Antwerp 1794), p. 369.

Compare this conduct of the Jesuits with that of the unfortunate Jansenists, convulsionaries in the last century, and sans-culottes in ours, preachers of a severe morality whose complaisant hands were ready at the first sign to swear the oath of schism and revolt. They have certainly proved their affiliation!

well that they caballed and interfered with government business; but this is the government's fault. Why did they allow it? I blame not Father Le Tellier, but Louis XV."[23]

This is reason itself that wrote this passage. I could add to this testimony that of another warrior, one you would scarcely expect to hear cited on this subject.

"The Jesuits," he said, "had the great talent of elevating the souls of their disciples through self-esteem, and of inspiring courage, disinterestedness, and self-sacrifice."[24]

This is something, as we can see; but it is less a question here of examining the merit of the Jesuits than the power of their instruction, which may be opposed to that of philosophy, which assisted by all human power, wanted to attempt almost the same thing.

Saint Ignatius, to get control of general education, did not beg sovereigns, in an *uncivil manner*, to cede absolute power to him *for a year*; he established an Order of men that won all sovereigns on his side. He did not ask for millions, but people undertook to offer millions to his children. His bank was general persuasion and his society was rich because it succeeded everywhere; but even these riches, which have

[23] Letter of 18 October 1777, in the volume cited above. [There is no letter of 18 October 1777. The passage appears in Frederick's letter of 18 November 1777. See *The Complete Works of Voltaire*, ed. T. Bestermann, 129:103–4.]

[24] *Vie du général Dumouriez*, 1795, Vol. 1, p. 2. The general tells us (Ibid.) that he would have become a Jesuit, if the *best of fathers* had not had him read Bayle's *Analysis* and other good books; but it is a big question to know if this father, like so many others, had not deceived himself. If his son had passed only six months in the Jesuit novitiate, never would he have confided a certain secret to an envoy of the National Convention. However if he had made his vows in the Order, I have no doubt that with his talents, energy, and ambition, he would have acquired a great and unblemished reputation, perhaps in the sciences, perhaps in the apostolate, who knows? He was a man who could have converted the Kalmouk Tartars, the New-Zealanders, or the Patagonians. In the end, in one way or other, his life would have had to have been written; which would have been much better than writing it himself.

[Charles-François Dumouriez (1739–1823) was the author of a self-serving autobiography: *Vie privée et politique du général Dumouriez, pour servir de suite à ses Mémoires* (Hamburg: Hoffman 1794). An officer under the old regime, he joined the Jacobins in 1790; he was Minister of Foreign Relations in March 1792 and was the author of the declaration of war against Austria. A victor at Valmy and Jemappes, he conquered Belgium, but was defeated at Neerwinden (18 March 1793). An adversary of the National Convention, Dumouriez negotiated secretly with Austria and passed over to the enemy in April 1793. His offer to serve was rejected by the Allies; England finally gave him a pension in 1800. (Darcel ed.)]

been spoken of as equal to those of Tamerlane, were still a magic edifice that belonged to the spirit of the Order and disappeared with it. Shamefully wasted in government's coffers, these riches, so powerful in the hands of their possessors, did not produce a single useful establishment in Europe.

It was a curious thing to hear the *philosophes*, veritable prodigies of pride and impotence, declaiming bitterly against the pride of these Jesuits who, in a century, were seen making themselves school masters of all of Catholic Europe, [spiritual] directors of all the sovereigns in this part of the world, eloquent preachers before kings, men of good company among the aristocracy, humble missionaries in the workshops of the people, enlightened children with children, mandarins and astronomers in China, martyrs in Japan, and legislators in Paraguay.

Certainly, it would not have required nearly as much to intoxicate the pride of these pygmies who announced with trumpet fanfares that they had donated a *garland of roses*, founded an *incentive prize*, or rewarded some academic verbiage with a twenty-five louis pension.

Where now are the *clock makers of Ferney* that Voltaire ridiculously called his *colony* and with which he entertained us to boredom? If he had been able to assemble two or three hundred savages on the banks of the Orinoco or the Mississippi, persuaded them to forsake human flesh in the name of philosophy, and taught them to count to twenty, he would have died (I do not exaggerate), choked with pride, demanding an apothesis.

"D'Alembert (and Voltaire) were close to Frederick, and Diderot was close to Catherine; and Russia remains peopled with barbarians, and Prussia remains peopled with slaves."

So from whose mouth did this anathema come? From that of a member of the National Convention speaking to this assembly on national education in the name of the Committee on Public Instruction.[25]

One would think that we were hearing a criminal of the old regime tortured to reveal the secrets of his *band*.

La Bruyère, mocking human power in the last century, said to it: "*I do not ask you to make me a beautiful woman; just make me a toad.*"[26]

A *toad*. This is too much; it is as difficult to make as a beautiful woman, and we must not be so demanding. I will say only: "Human

[25] Lakanal, in the name of the Committee on Public Instruction. (Session of 24 October 1794. *Moniteur*, no. 37, p. 164.)

[26] *Characteristics*, Vol. 2, chapter on freethinkers.

power, prideful philosophy, make what you wish, but make something. Choose, in the vast sphere of the possible whatever appears to you to be the most easy; choose among your disciples the most able, the most energetic, and the most zealous for your glory. Let him show us your power by some useful institution. We do not ask that it function for centuries; we will be content, provided that *his work lasts a little longer than himself.*"

No, never will philosophy honour itself by a useful establishment, and since it is a question of education, one can rashly challenge the all-powerful legislators of France to found, not I say a durable government, but only a primary school with universal public acceptance, that is to say, the principle of duration.[27]

[27] The revolutionary spirit has just brought forth a curious work to promote the views of these legislators; it is an *Instruction à l'usage de la jeunesse, tirée de l'exemple des animaux.* (*Moniteur*, 15 November 1794, no. 57, p. 246.)

Oh illustrious author, whoever your are, you who are a worthy organ of human *reason*, receive my homage; no one is more worthy than you of serving the views of the worshipers of the *Goddess Reason* and of those who say: "The nation salaries no religion." The generation that they have infected no longer belongs to human nature.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Continuation of the Same Subject

"When I think," said the king of Prussia, whom I always cite with pleasure, "that a *fool*, an *imbecile* like Saint Ignatius found a dozen proselytes who followed him, and that I cannot find three philosophes, I have been tempted to believe that reason is good for nothing."[1]

Although this passage was written in a *paroxysm*, nevertheless it is precious; the great man was on the right path. Undoubtedly, in a certain sense reason is good for nothing. We have the scientific knowledge necessary for the maintenance of society; we have made conquests in the science of numbers and in what are called the natural sciences. However, once we leave the circle of our needs, our knowledge becomes useless or doubtful. The human mind, always at work, *pushes* systems that succeed each other without interruption. They are born, flourish, wither, and die like the leaves of trees; their year is longer, and that is the whole difference.

In the whole extent of the moral and physical world, what do we know, and what can we do? We *know* the morality we received from our fathers as a collection of dogmas or useful prejudices adopted by the national mind. On this point we owe nothing to any man's individual reason. On the contrary, every time this reason has interfered, it has perverted morality.[2]

[1] *Oeuvres de Voltaire*, Vol. LXXXVI, 3rd of correspondence. Letter 162. [The letter cited is in fact *from* Voltaire *to* Frederick II, 31 October 1769. See *The Complete Works of Voltaire*, 119:314.]

[2] Several writers have amused themselves by collecting the frightful maxims disseminated only in the works of the French philosophes; but no one, I think, has done it in a more striking manner that an anonymous author in the old *Journal de France*, 1791 or 1792. (The reference escapes me.)

In politics, we *know* that it is necessary to respect the powers established we know not how nor by whom. When time leads to abuses capable of altering the principles of governments, we *know* that these abuses must be eliminated, but without undermining the principles, which requires a great dexterity, and we *are able* to bring about these salutary reforms up to the moment when, the principle of life being totally vitiated, the death of the political body is inevitable.[3]

It would be a very interesting work that would examine the powers of our reason and tell us exactly what we *know* and what we *can do*. Let us limit ourselves to repeating that individual reason produces nothing and conserves nothing for the general welfare. It is like an impure insect that soils our apartments; always solitary, always hiding in corners, it produces nothing but harmful vanities. Swollen with pride, it is only venom, it works only to destroy, it declines all working associations, and if chance leads a similar being *into its web*, it pounces on it and devours it.

The national mind resembles that other insect that Asia gave to Europe; innocent and peaceful, it is only at ease with its fellows and lives only to be useful. Carnage is alien to it; all its substance is a treasure, and the precious cloth that it leaves us on dying forms the *girdle* of beauty and the cloak of kings.

This famous Frederick was surprised and indignant not to be able to find *three philosophes* to follow him. Great prince, you know little of the true principle of all associations and all human institutions! So, by what right could your mind subject that of another and force it to

[3] Rousseau, in abusing a common comparison, advanced, with respect to political illnesses, an incredible error that it is good to point out in passing, in order always to make his way of reasoning better known, and to expose this theory still more. "It is not within the power of men to prolong their lives; it is within their power to prolong that of the state..." (*Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. xi.) [*CW*, 4:188.]

What! There is no medicine, no hygiene, no surgery! Diet and exercise are abuses, and it is not necessary to bleed for pleurisy! Mercury is of no use to the *philosophes*, and in the case of an aneurysm it is not necessary to tie the artery! Here is a new discovery. However Rousseau would not have been embarrassed; since he was the world champion in defending one error by another, he would have defended fatalism rather than retreat. Let us follow the comparison, so true and consequently so trivial, of the animal body and the political body.

Man begets his kind, but his industry counts for nothing in this. In this matter, the most stupid animal knows as much as he does. Generation is an inpenetrable mystery; man is only a *passive agent*, a blind instrument in the hands of a hidden worker who says nothing of his secret. Man's influence in the formation of governments is about the same.

march to your tune? You never knew how to raise yourself above the idea of force; and if you had collected some materials that you could have held together with your arms of iron, did you think that your arms would have dispensed with cement? No, this is not the way one creates. You have disappeared from the theatre that you illuminated and bloodied; but your contemporaries are still there...

Do not be deceived. The successes of philosophy might dazzle inattentive eyes; it is important to appreciate them. If you ask these men what they have done, they will talk to you of their influence on opinion; they will tell you that they destroyed *prejudices* and especially *fanaticism*, for this is their great word. They will celebrate in magnificent terms the kind of magistracy that Voltaire exercised on his century during his long career; but, in the last analysis, these words *prejudices* and *fanaticism* signify the belief of several nations. Voltaire chased that belief from a crowd of heads, that it is say, that *he destroyed it*, and this is precisely what I am saying. Philosophy does no less, so that a man indulging his individual reason is dangerous in the moral and political order precisely in proportion to his talents. The more wit, activity, and perseverance he has, the more deadly his existence. He only multiplies a negative power and sinks into nothingness.

A pen friendly to religion addressing reproaches to philosophy is suspect to a great number of readers who obstinately see fanaticism everywhere they do not see incredulity or *indifferentism*.

So it will not be useless to borrow the words of a writer who cried out in his own terms: "Oh Providence, IF YOU EXIST, answer! Who will be able to absolve you?"[4] This man is surely not a fanatic. See in what terms he accosts the philosophes:

"And you foolish philosophes, who in your knowing presumption claim to direct the world, you apostles of *tolerance* and humanity *who prepared our GLORIOUS Revolution*, who bragged of the progress of light and reason, come out of your tombs, come out into the midst of these ruins and cadavers, and explain to us how, in this so highly vaunted century, thirty tyrants who commanded murder could find three hundred thousand executioners to carry it out? Your writings are in their pockets; your maxims are on their lips; your pages shine in their *reports* to the tribune. It is in the name of virtue that the most frightful robberies will be committed; it is in the name of humanity that two million men will perish; it is in the name of liberty that a hundred thousand Bastilles will be erected. There is not one of your writings that would not be on the desks of our forty thousand Revolutionary

[4] *Accusateur public*, no. 2, p. 22, lines 19 and 20.

Committees. They would put down Diderot for a moment to order drownings! ... The only fruit of your studies was to teach crime to cover itself with polished language in order to carry out more dangerous blows. Injustice and violence are called *sharp forms*; blood flowing in torrents, *perspiration of the political body* ... Did you think, pretended sages, that the seed of philosophy could grow on terrain that is barren, arid, and without culture? In your wild paradoxes and metaphysical abstractions, did you count men's passions for nothing?" etc.[5]

Rousseau drew the portrait of the philosophes without suspecting that he was drawing his own; it would be useless to cite here this striking piece that everyone knows.[6] However there is one phrase that merits particular attention: "*If you count votes*," he says, "*each one is reduced to his own.*"[7] There, all in one phrase, is the condemnation of philosophy and the certificate of philosophy inflicted on Rousseau by Rousseau himself. What is philosophy in the modern sense? *It is the substitution of individual reason for national dogmas*; this is what Rousseau worked at all his life, his indomitable pride constantly embroiling him with any kind of authority. Rousseau therefore is a *philosophe*, since he *has only his own voice*, which has not the least right on that of others.

There exists a book entitled *De Jean-Jacques Rousseau considéré comme auteur de la Révolution*, 2 vols., in-8°.[8] This book and the bronze statue that the National Convention awarded Rousseau are

[5] Ibid.

[6] *Emile*, Chant II. [The reference is incorrect. Maistre's allusion is to the diatribe that appears in the Profession of the Savoyard Vicar in Book IV. (Pléiade, 3:568 and 632.) See note 7 to Chap. 2, p. 51 above.]

[7] [Ibid. Bloom, 268.]

[8] This book is a proof both laughable and deplorable of French impetuosity and of the precipitation of judgement that is the particular character of that nation. The Revolution is not ended, and nothing protends its end. It has already produced great evils, and it announces greater ones still. While all those who could have contributed in some way to this terrible overthrow should be hiding themselves underground, here is a Rousseau enthusiast presenting him as the author of this Revolution in order to recommend him to the admiration and recognition of men. And while this author is writing his book, the Revolution is leading to all kinds of crimes, all imaginable evils, and covering an unfortunate nation with a perhaps indelible opprobrium. [Louis-Sébastien Mercier was the author of this apology of *J.-J. Rousseau, considéré comme l'un des premiers auteurs de la Révolution* (Paris: Buisson 1791). (Darcel ed.)]

perhaps the greatest opprobrium that has ever tarnished any writer's reputation.

However Voltaire contends with Rousseau for the fearful honour of having made the French Revolution, and there are great authorities in his favour.

It is to Voltaire that Frederick II wrote: "The structure of superstition, sapped in its foundations, is going to collapse, and the nations will transcribe in their history that Voltaire was the promoter of this eighteenth-century Revolution in public opinion."[9]

It is Voltaire who wrote to Frederick: "We are losing taste, but we are acquiring thought; there is especially a Turgot who is worthy of talking to Your Majesty. The priests are in despair; here is the beginning of a great revolution. While we do not yet dare declare ourselves openly, we are secretly mining the palace of imposture founded 1775 years ago."[10]

It is of Voltaire that Rabaut de Saint-Etienne said: "*All the principles of liberty, all the seeds of the Revolution are contained in his writings; he predicted it, and he made it.*"[11]

Actually, the *glory* of having made the Revolution belongs exclusively to neither Voltaire nor Rousseau. The whole philosophic sect lays claim to its part of it; but it is just to consider Voltaire and Rousseau as the leaders; the one undermined the political system by corrupting morals, the other undermined morals by corrupting the political system. Voltaire's corrosive writings gnawed for sixty years at the very Christian cement of this superb structure whose fall has startled Europe. It is Rousseau whose stirring eloquence seduced the crowd over which imagination has more purchase than reason. He breathed everywhere scorn for authority and the spirit of insurrection. He is the one who traced the code of anarchy, and who, in the midst of some isolated and sterile truths that everyone before him knew, posed the disastrous principles of which the horrors we have seen are only the immediate consequences. Both of them were carried solemnly to the Pantheon in virtue of the National Convention's decree, which thus condemned their memory to the last punishment.

Nowadays people are enraptured with the influence of Voltaire and his like; they speak to us of the *power* that they exercised over their century. Yes, they were powerful like poisons and fires.

[9] The King of Prussia to Voltaire. (Voltaire, *Oeuvres*, 86:248.)

[10] Voltaire to the King of Prussia, 3 August 1775. (*Oeuvres*, 87:185.)

[11] *Précis de l'histoire de la Révolution*, Bk. I, p. 15.

Wherever individual reason dominates, nothing can be great, for everything great rests on a belief, and the clash of individual opinions left to itself produces only scepticism, which destroys everything. General and individual morality, religion, laws, venerated customs, useful prejudices – nothing can subsist, everything is undermined by scepticism; it is the universal solvent.

Let us always go back to simple ideas. Any *institution* is only a political structure. In physics and in morals, the laws are the same; you cannot build a large structure on a narrow foundation, nor a durable structure on a moving or transient base. In the political order, therefore, if one wants to build on a large scale and for the centuries, one must rely on an opinion, on a *large* and profound belief. For if this opinion does not dominate a majority of minds and if it is not deeply rooted, it will furnish only a *narrow* and transient base.

Moreover, if you look for what forms the great and solid bases of all possible first or second order institutions, one will always find religion and patriotism. And if you reflect even more attentively, you will find these two things intermingled, for there is no true patriotism without religion. Patriotism only shines in centuries of belief, and it always declines and dies with religion. As soon as man separates himself from divinity, he vitiates himself and vitiates everything he touches. His action becomes base, and he acts only to destroy. In proportion as this powerful tie is weakened in a State, so all the conserving virtues are weakened; all character is degraded, and even good actions become petty. A murderous egoism relentlessly presses public spirit to retreat before it, like those enormous glaciers of the high Alps that can be seen advancing slowly and frighteningly on the domain of life and destroying useful vegetation in their path.

However once the idea of divinity is the principle of human action, this action becomes fruitful, creative, and invincible. An unknown force makes itself felt everywhere, animating, warming, and vivifying everything. Whatever errors, whatever crimes have soiled this august idea with ignorance and human corruption, it still conserves its incredible influence. In the midst of massacres, men multiply, and nations display an astonishing vigour. "Long ago," says Rousseau, "Greece flourished in the midst of the cruelest wars. Blood flowed freely, and the whole country was covered with men."[12] Undoubtedly; but this was a century of prodigies and oracles, the century of *faith* as practised by the men of the time, that is to say, the century of exalted patriotism. When one has said of the Great Being that he exists, one

[12] *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. ix [note]. [*CW*, 4:186.]

has not yet said anything. It is necessary to say that he is *Existence*. "He, being One, has with only one *now* completely filled *for ever*."[13] A drop of this immeasurable ocean of existence seems to detach itself and fall on the man who speaks and acts in the name of the divinity; his action astonishes and gives an idea of creation. The centuries flow by and his work endures. Everything among men that is great, good, loveable, true, and durable comes from *Existence, the source of all existences; outside this* there is only error, corruption, and nothingness.

[13] Plutarch, *Moralia, The E at Delphi* [393]. [Trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb Classical Library 1957.]

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Necessary Elucidation

I must anticipate an objection. In reproaching human philosophy for the harm it has done us, do we not risk going too far and being unjust in its regard by swinging to the opposite excess?

No doubt it is necessary to guard against enthusiasm; but it seems that in this regard there is one sure rule for judging philosophy. It is useful when it does not leave its own sphere, that is to say, that of the natural sciences. In this area, all its endeavors are useful and merit our gratitude. But as soon as it puts its foot in the moral world, it must remember that it is no longer at home. It is the general mind that holds the sceptre in this domain; and philosophy, that is to say, the individual mind, becomes injurious and in consequence guilty if it dares contradict or put in question the sacred laws of this sovereign, that is to say, the national dogmas. Its duty, then, when it moves into the empire of this sovereign, is to act in concert with it. By means of this distinction, whose correctness I do not believe can be contested, we know what we should hold about philosophy; it is good when it remains in its own domains, or when it enters into the scope of an empire superior to its own only as an ally and even as a subject; it is detestable when it enters as a rival or an enemy.

This distinction serves to judge the century in which we live and the one that preceded it; all the great men of the seventeenth century were especially remarkable by a general character of respect and submission towards all the civil and religious laws of their countries. You will find in their writings nothing rash, nothing paradoxical, nothing contrary to the national dogmas that were for them givens, maxims, sacred axioms that they never put in question.

What distinguishes them is an exquisite common sense whose prodigious merit is sensed well only by men who have escaped the influence of false modern taste. Since they always address the conscience of their readers and that conscience is infallible, it seems

that one always thought what they thought, and sophisticated wits complained that one found *nothing new* in their works, while their merit is precisely to clothe in brilliant colours those general truths belonging to every country and to all places, and on which repose the happiness of empires, families, and individuals.

What is today called a *new idea*, a *bold thought*, a *great thought*, was almost always called, in the dictionary of writers of the last century, *criminal audacity*, *delirium*, or *outrage*; that fact shows on which side reason is to be found.[1]

I know that philosophy, ashamed of its dreadful successes, has taken the position of boldly disavowing the excesses that we are witnessing; but this is not the way to escape the criticisms of the wise. Happily for humanity, fatal theories are rarely found joined to the same men who have the power to put them into practice. But what does it matter to me that Spinoza lived quietly in a Dutch village? What does it matter to me that the weak, timid, and sickly Rousseau never had the will or the power to stir up seditions? What does it matter to me that Voltaire

[1] It is something well worth noticing that in our modern times philosophy has become impotent in proportion that it has become audacious; the mathematical imagination of the famous Boskowich expressed the point this way: "If we consider the preceding century and the first years of the eighteenth century, how fertile this period was in numerous and remarkable discoveries in the philosophical disciplines and especially in physico-mathematics! Now if we compare it to the present time, it must be admitted that we have regressed to the point of stagnation, if we have not even begun to move backward. In effect what progress was made by Descartes, especially in the application of algebra and geometry, by Galileo and Huygens, especially in optics, astronomy, and mechanics; and what progress was brought about by Newton in the domains of analysis, geometry, mechanics, and especially astronomy, and the contributions that he himself, Leibniz, and the whole Bernouilli family made in the discovery and the progress of infinitesimal calculus.

But they did all this in the space of a hundred years, at first one after another, then gradually thinned out. For the last thirty years, scarcely anything has been added, and if there have been acquisitions in this domain, they can in no way be compared to the precedents, even if considerable for disciples. Have we not arrived at the point where, discoveries diminishing, retreat will follow rapidly, so that curve that traces this situation and the progress of this production will descend to the line of the abscissa and fall brutally below?" Roger Joseph Boskowich, *Vaticinium quoddam geometricum*, in the supplement to Benedetto Stay, *Philosophiae recentioris ... verbis traditae*, [2 vols. (Rome 1755)] 1:408. [Roger Joseph Boskowich (as his Serbo-Croatian name Rudger Josep Bošković, is usually rendered in English) was a distinguished Jesuit scientist who lived from 1711 to 1787. He is credited with developing the first coherent atomic theory in his work *Theoria Philosophiae Naturalis* (1758).]

defended Calas in order to get his name in the papers? What does it matter to me that during the frightful tyranny that has crushed France, the philosophes, trembling for their heads, have shut themselves up in a prudent silence? Since they posed maxims capable of bringing forth all these crimes, these crimes are their work, since the criminals are their disciples. The most guilty of all perhaps has not been afraid to boast publicly that *after having obtained great success for reason, he took refuge in silence when it was no longer possible for reason to be heard*;[2] but the success of *reason* was only that intermediate state through which it was necessary to pass in order to arrive at all the horrors we have seen. Philosophes! Having produced the cause, never will you be able to exonerate yourselves by expressing pity for the effect. *You detest the crimes*, you say. *You have not slaughtered anyone*. Well! *You have not slaughtered anyone*; that is the sole praise that you can be accorded. But you have caused the slaughter. You are the ones who said to the people: "*The people, sole author of political government and distributor of the power confided wholly or in different parts to its magistrates, is eternally within its rights in interpreting its contract, or rather its gifts, in modifying its clauses, annuling them, or establishing a new order of things.*"[3] You are the one who told them: "*Laws are always useful to those who have possessions and harmful to those that have nothing. It follows from this that the social state is only advantageous to men insofar as they all have something, and none of them has anything superfluous.*"[4] It is you who told them: "*You are sovereign; you can change your laws as you wish, even the best fundamental laws, even the social compact; and, if you wish to do harm to yourselves, who has the right to prevent it?*[5] All the rest is

[2] Notice on the life of Sieyès by himself. [*Notice sur la vie de Sieyès, membre de la première Assemblée nationale et de la Convention, écrit à Paris, en messidor, deuxième année de l'ère républicaine* (Switzerland and Paris, An III). This work has been attributed to Sieyès or Conrad Engelbert Oelsner. (Darcel ed.)]

[3] Mably, cited in Nedham's translation, 1:21.

[4] [Rousseau], *Contrat social*, Bk. I, chap. ix [note]. [*CW*, 4:144.]

[5] Ibid., Bk. II, chap. xii; Bk. III, chap. viii. [This "quotation" appears to be a paraphrase of what Rousseau says near the end of chap. xviii of Book III: "...in the State there is no fundamental law that cannot be revoked, not even the social compact. For if all the Citizens were to assemble is order to break this compact by common agreement, there is no doubt that it would be very legitimately broken." *CW*, 4:197.]

only a consequence. The detestable Lebon,[6] the butcher of Arras, the monster *who halted the blade of the guillotine ready to fall on the heads of his victims in order to read the news to the unfortunate wretches stretched on the scaffold, and then slaughtered them,*[7] who answered when he was questioned at the bar of the National Convention by the only men in the world who did not have the right to find him guilty: "*I carried out terrible laws,*" he said, "*laws that have frightened you. I was wrong ... I can be treated as I treated others. When I met men of principle, I let myself be led by them.* IT IS ABOVE ALL THE PRINCIPLES OF J.-J ROUSSEAU THAT HAVE KILLED ME."[8]

He was right. The tiger that kills is following its nature; the real criminal is the one who unmuzzles him and launches him on society. Do not believe that you are absolved by your affected *threnodies*[9] on Marat and Robespierre. Listen to a truth: wherever you are and wherever anyone has the misfortune to believe you, there will be similar monsters, for every society contains scoundrels who are only waiting to tear it apart and to be unleashed from the restraint of the laws. But without you, Marat and Robespierre would have caused no harm, because they would have been contained by the restraint that you have broken.

[6] [Ghislain-François-Joseph Lebon (1765–1795), an ex-Oratorian who became a Constitutional priest, then mayor of Arras, was a moderate until 1792. Elected a deputy to the Convention, he was appointed a "deputy on mission" and applied political terror in Arras and in the Departments of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais. Arrested after Thermidor, he was decapitated on 9 October 1795 at Amiens. (Darcel ed.)]

[7] *Nouvelles politiques nationales et étrangères*, 1795, no. 272, p. 1088.

[8] Session of 6 July 1795. *Quotidienne* or *Tableau de Paris*, no. 139, p. 4.

[9] ["Threnodies" are verse pieces expressing lamentations of a public or private misfortune. (Darcel ed.)]

BOOK TWO

On the Nature of Sovereignty

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CHAPTER ONE

On the Nature of Sovereignty in General

Every kind of sovereignty is absolute by its nature; whether it is placed on one or several heads, whether it is divided, however the powers are organized, in the last analysis there will always be an absolute power that will be able to commit evil with impunity, which will therefore, from this point of view, be *despotic* in the full sense of the term, and against which there will be no other defence than that of insurrection.

Wherever powers are divided, the conflicts of these different powers can be considered as the deliberations of a single sovereign, whose reason balances the *pros* and the *cons*. But once the decision is made, the effect is the same in both cases and the will of any sovereign whatever is always invincible.

In whatever way sovereignty is defined or placed, it is always one, inviolable, and absolute. Let us take the English government, for example. The type of political trinity that makes it up does not prevent the sovereignty from being one, there as elsewhere. The powers balance each other; but once they agree there is only one will that cannot be thwarted by any other legal will, and Blackstone[1] was right to say that the King and Parliament of England together *can do anything*.

The sovereign therefore cannot be judged; if he could be, the power that had this right would be sovereign, and there would be two sovereigns, which implies contradiction. *The supreme authority cannot be modified any more than it can be alienated; to limit it is to destroy it. It is absurd and contradictory for the sovereign to choose a superior*;[2] the principle is so incontestable that even where sovereignty is divided as in England, the action of one power on another is limited to resistance. The House of Commons can refuse a tax proposed by a minister; the House

[1] [See note 6 to Chap. 9, p. 85 above.]

[2] [Rousseau], *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. xvi. [*CW*, 4:194–5.]

of Lords can refuse its assent to a bill proposed by the other house, and the king in his turn can refuse his assent to a bill proposed by the two houses. However, if you give the king the power to judge and to punish the lower house for having refused a tax through caprice or wickedness, if you attribute to him the right to force the consent of the Lords when it appears to him that they have unreasonably rejected a bill passed by the Commons, if you invest one of the Houses or both with the right to judge and punish the king for having abused the executive power, there is no more government; the power that judges is everything, that which is judged is nothing, and the Constitution is dissolved.

The French *Constituent* Assembly never showed itself more alien to all political principles than when it dared decree the case where the king would be supposed to have abdicated the monarchy. These laws formally dethroned the king; they decreed at the same time that there would be a king and that there would not, or, in other words, that the sovereignty would not be sovereign.

One would not be excusing this incompetence by observing that in the Assembly's system the king was not sovereign. This would not be an objection if the representatives' Assembly were itself sovereign; but under their Constitution the National Assembly is no more sovereign than the king. It is the nation alone that possesses sovereignty; but this sovereignty is only metaphysical. The *palpable* sovereignty is entirely in the hands of the representatives and the king, that is to say the elected representatives and the hereditary representative. Therefore, up to the moment when the people judge it appropriate to recover their sovereignty by insurrection, it is completely in the hands of those who exercise it; so that all corporate powers, in relation to one another, are independent or are nothing.

The more one examines this question, the more one will be convinced that sovereignty, even partial sovereignty, cannot be judged, displaced, nor punished, by virtue of a law; for no power possessing a coercive force on itself, all power *amenable* before an other power is necessarily *subject* to this power, since the latter makes the laws that rule the former. And if it can make these laws, what will prevent it from making others, multiplying the cases of felony and of presumed abdication, creating crimes as it has need, and finally, of judging without law. This famous *division of powers*, which has so greatly agitated French heads, does not really exist in the French Constitution of 1791.

In order for there to be a real division of powers, the king would have had to have been invested with a power capable of balancing that of the Assembly and even of judging the representatives in certain cases, as he could have been judged in others. But the king did not have this power, so that all the work of the legislators only resulted in creating a single

power without counterweights, that is to say a *tyranny*, if liberty is made to consist in the division of powers.

This was certainly worth the trouble of *tormenting* Europe, of wiping out perhaps four million men, of crushing a nation under the weight of all possible evils, and of defiling it with crimes *unknown to hell*!

But let us come back to sovereign unity. If we reflect attentively on this subject, we will find perhaps that the *division of powers*, which has been talked about so much, never involves the sovereign properly speaking, which always belongs to *one* man or *one* body. In England, the real sovereign is the king. An Englishman is not a subject of Parliament; and however powerful, however respectable this illustrious body may be, no one thinks to call it *sovereign*. If we examine all possible governments that have the right or the pretention to call themselves *free*, we will see that *powers* that seem to possess a portion of sovereignty are really only counter-weights or moderators that regulate or slow the action of the real sovereign. Perhaps it would not be incorrect to define the Parliament of England as "the *king's necessary Council*"; perhaps it is something more, perhaps it suffices to believe that it is. What is, is good; what is believed is good; everything is good, except the supposed creations of man.

In certain aristocratic governments, or mixtures of aristocracy and democracy, the nature of these governments is such that sovereignty belongs by right to a certain body and by fact to another; and the equilibrium consists in the fear or the habitual uneasiness that the first inspires in the second. Both ancient and modern times furnish examples of these sorts of governments.

Too many details on this particular issue would be out of place here; it suffices for us to know that all sovereignty is necessarily *one* and necessarily *absolute*. So the great problem is not to prevent the sovereign from *willing invincibly*, which implies contradiction, but to prevent him from *willing unjustly*.

The Roman jurisconsults have been greatly criticized for saying that the prince is *above the laws (princeps solutus est legibus)*. The critics would have been much more indulgent towards them if they had observed that the jurisconsults only meant to speak of civil laws, or, to put it better, of the formalities that they established for different civil acts.

But even if they would have meant that the prince can violate moral laws with impunity, that is to say without being judged, they would only have advanced a truth that is sad, no doubt, but incontestable.

While I might be forced to agree that one has the *right* to slaughter Nero, I would never agree that one has the right to judge him. For the law by virtue of which one would judge him would either have been made by him or by another, which would suppose either a law made by a sover-

eign against himself, or a sovereign above the sovereign, two equally inadmissible suppositions.

In considering governments where powers are divided, it is easy to believe that the sovereign can be judged, because of the activity of each power acting on the others and which, quickening its activity on certain extraordinary occasions, causes secondary insurrections that have many fewer inconveniences than true or popular insurrections. But one must take care to guard against the parologism into which one easily falls of considering only one of these powers. They must be looked at together and we must ask if the sovereign will resulting from their joint will can be stopped, contradicted, or punished?

First of all, you will find that every sovereign is despotic, and that, with regard to him, only two courses can be taken, obedience or insurrection. In truth, one can maintain that, although all sovereign wills are equally absolute, it does not follow that they are equally blind or vicious, and that republican or mixed governments are superior to monarchy precisely because in them sovereign decisions are generally wiser and more enlightened. This is in fact one of the principal considerations that must serve as the basis of the important examination of the superiority of one form of government over another.

In the second place, you will find that it is just the same to be *subject* to one sovereign as to another.

CHAPTER TWO

Of Monarchy

One can say in general that all men are born for monarchy. This is the oldest and the most universal form of government.[1] Before the time of Theseus, there was no question of a republic in the world. Democracy above all is so rare and so transient, that we are allowed not to take it into account. Monarchical government is so natural that, without realizing it, men identify it with sovereignty; they seem to be tacitly agreed that there is no true *sovereign* wherever there is no king. I have given several examples of this that it would be easy to multiply.

This observation is especially striking with respect to all that has been said for and against the question that was the subject of the first book of this work. The adversaries of divine origin always hold a grudge against *kings* and talk only of *kings*. They do not want to believe that the authority of kings comes from God; but it is not a question of *kingship* in particular, but of *sovereignty* in general. Yes, all sovereignty comes God; under whatever form it exists, it is not the work of man. It is one, absolute, and inviolable by its nature. So why lay the blame on kingship, as if all the inconveniences on which they call to combat this system were not the same with any kind of government? Once again, it is because monarchy is the *natural government*, and in ordinary discourse men confuse it with sovereignty

[1] "That [king] was the first title of sovereignty among men." Sallust *The War with Catiline* 2. [Loeb.] "All ancient nations were at one time ruled by kings." Cicero *The Laws* 3.2.4. [Loeb.] "For nature herself conceived the idea of a king." Seneca *On Mercy* 1.19 [Trans. John W. Basone, Loeb Classical Library 1963.] – In the new world, which is also a recent world, the two peoples who had made great enough steps towards civilization, the Mexicans and Peruvians, were governed by kings; and even among the savages one will find rudiments of monarchy.

by disregarding other governments, just as they neglect the exception when enunciating the general rule.

On this subject I will observe that the common division of governments into three kinds, monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, rests entirely on a Greek prejudice that took hold of the schools during the Renaissance, and which we have not known how to undo. The Greeks always saw the whole world in Greece; and as the three kinds of government were well enough balanced in that small country, the statesmen of that nation imagined the general division I have just mentioned. However if we want to be accurate, logical rigour will not permit us to establish a genre on one exception, and, to express ourselves accurately, we must say: "men in general are governed by kings. However, we see nations where sovereignty belongs to several persons, and such governments can be called aristocracy or democracy, according to THE NUMBER of persons who form THE SOVEREIGN."

It is always necessary to call men back to history, which is the first master in politics, or more exactly the only master. When it is said that men are born for liberty, this is a phrase that makes no sense. If a being of a higher order undertook the *natural history* of man, surely it is in the history of facts that he would look for direction. When he knows what man is, and what he has always been, what he does and what he has always done, he would write; and undoubtedly he would dismiss as folly the idea that man is not what he must be and that his state is contrary to the laws of creation. The mere statement of this proposition is sufficient to refute it.

History is experimental politics, that is to say, the only good politics; and just as in physics a hundred volumes of speculative theories disappear before a single experiment, in the same way in political science no system can be admitted if it is not the more or less probable corollary of well attested facts. If one asks what is the government most natural to man, history is there to respond: *It is monarchy.*

This form of government undoubtedly has its drawbacks, like all others; but all the declamations that fill current books on these sorts of abuses are pitiful. They are born of pride, not reason. Once it is rigorously demonstrated that nations are not made for the same form of government, that each nation has that which is best for it, and above all that "freedom ... is not accessible to all peoples, [and] the more one ponders this principle established by Montesquieu, the more one senses its truth,"[2] we can no longer understand the meaning of these disserta-

[2] [Rousseau], *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. viii. [*CW*, 4:181.]

tions on the vices of monarchical government. If their aim is to make the unfortunate people destined to suffer these abuses feel them more vividly, this is a most barbarous pastime; if their aim is to urge men to revolt against a government made for them, it is an indescribable crime.

Nevertheless the subjects of monarchies are by no means reduced to saving themselves from despair by philosophical meditations; they have something better to do, which is to impress on their minds the excellence of their government, and to learn to envy nothing of others.

Rousseau, who in his whole life was unable to pardon God for his not being born a duke or peer, was very angry against a form of government that is based on distinctions. He complained especially of hereditary succession, by which nations have preferred "the risk of having children, monsters, and imbeciles for leaders ... to having to argue over the choice of good Kings."[3]

No reply is necessary to this parlourmaid's objection, but it is useful to observe how infatuated this man was by false ideas on human action. "When one king dies," he says, "another is needed. Elections leave dangerous intervals; they are stormy ... intrigue and corruption are involved. It is difficult for one to whom the State has been sold not to sell it in turn, etc. ... What has been done to prevent these evils? Crowns have been made hereditary in certain families, etc."[4]

Would one not say that all monarchies were first elective, and that nations, *considering* the many drawbacks of this government, finally decided *in their wisdom* on hereditary monarchy?

We know how well this supposition agrees with history, but this is not the question. What it is important to repeat is that never did a nation give itself a government, that all ideas of convention and deliberation are fanciful, and that every sovereignty is a creation.

Certain nations are destined, perhaps *condemned*, to elective monarchy; Poland, for example, was subjected to this kind of sovereignty. In 1791 it made an effort to change its constitution for the better. See what this brought about; one could have predicted the result immediately. The nation was too much in agreement; there was too much reasoning, too much prudence, too much philosophy in this great enterprise. The nobility, by a generous devotion, renounced the right it had to the crown. The third estate entered into the administration. The people were unburdened; they acquired rights without insurrection. The immense majority of the nation and even the nobility supported the

[3] Ibid., Bk. III, chap. vi. [*CW*, 4:179.]

[4] [Ibid. *CW*, 4:178.]

new project. A humane and philosophic king supported it with all his influence; the crown was fixed in a famous house already *related* to Poland, and the personal qualities of its chief recommended him to all of Europe. What do you think of it? Nothing was more *reasonable*: this was the very impossibility. The more a nation is in agreement on a new constitution, the more wills are united to sanction the change, the more workers there are united in their wish to raise the new edifice, the more especially there are written laws calculated *a priori*, the more it will be proved that what the multitude wants will never happen. It was Russian arms, you will say, that overturned the new Polish constitution. Eh! Undoubtedly, there always has to be a cause, and what does it matter if it is one or another?

If a Polish stable-boy or a cabaret servant said they had been sent by heaven to undertake this same work, undoubtedly they might not have succeeded; but it would have been in the ranks of possible things, for in this case there would have been no proportion between the cause and the effect, an invariable condition in political creations, so that man senses that he concurs only as an instrument, and that the mass of men born to obey never stipulate the conditions of their obedience.

If some philosopher is saddened by the hard condition of human nature, the father of Italian poetry can console him.[5]

Let us pass on to examine the principal characteristics of monarchical government.

Mirabeau said somewhere in his book on the Prussian monarchy: "*A king is an idol put there, etc.*"[6] Putting aside the reprehensible form of this thought, it is certain that he is right. Yes, undoubtedly, the king is there, in the middle of all the powers, like the sun in the middle of the planets; he rules and he animates.

Monarchy is a *centralized* aristocracy. At all times and in all places, the aristocracy commands. Whatever form is given to governments, birth and wealth always obtain the first rank, and nowhere do they rule more harshly than where their dominion is not founded on law. But in a monarchy, the king is the centre of this aristocracy; it is true that the aristocracy rules as elsewhere; but it rules in the king's name, or if you will, the king is guided by the knowledge of the aristocracy.

[5] *Vuolsi cose colà dove si puote*
Ciò che si vuole, e più non dimandare.
(Dante, *Inferno*, chap. III.)
"Man, do you want to sleep soundly? Put your foolish head on this pillow."

[6] [*De la monarchie prussiene sous Frédéric le Grand* (London 1788). (Darcel ed.)]

"The sophism that is habitually used by political thinkers of royalty," says Rousseau again, is that "this magistrate [the king] is liberally given all the virtues he might need, and it is always assumed that the Prince is what he ought to be."[7] I do not know what royal politician made this strange supposition; Rousseau should have cited him. As he read very little, it is probable that he assumed this assertion, or that he took it from some dedicatory epistle.

Avoiding all exaggerations, one can be certain that the government of a single person is that in which the vices of the sovereign have the least influence on the governed peoples.

Recently, at the opening of the republican Lyceum of Paris, a quite remarkable truth was expressed: "In absolute[8] governments, the faults of the master can scarcely ruin everything at once, because his single will cannot do everything; but a republican government is obliged to be essentially reasonable and just, because the general will, once it goes astray, carries everything away with it."[9]

This observation is most just; it is far from true that the king's will does everything in a monarchy. It is *supposed* to do everything, and this is the great advantage of this government; but, in fact, it only serves to centralize counsel and enlightenment. Religion, laws, customs, opinion, and class and corporate privileges restrain the sovereign and prevent him from abusing his power; it is even quite remarkable that kings are much more often accused of lacking will than of abusing it. It is always the king's council that rules.

But the *pyramidal* aristocracy that administers the state in monarchies has particular characteristics that deserve all our attention.

In all countries and under all possible governments, the highest posts will always (save exceptions) belong to the aristocracy, that is to say to nobility and wealth, most often united. Aristotle, in saying that this *must be so*, enunciated a political axiom that simple good sense and the

[7] *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. vi. [*CW*, 4:179.]

[8] It would be necessary to say *arbitrary*, for all governments are absolute.

[9] Speech given at the opening of the republican Lycée, 31 December 1794, by M. de la Harpe. (*Journal de Paris*, no. 114, p. 461.)

In the fragment you have just read, the professor of the Lycée told the Republic a terrible truth; he strongly resembles a converted intellectual. [Jean-François de La Harpe (1739–1803), a literary critic and publicist, was a disciple of Voltaire and at first favourable to the Revolution. He was imprisoned under the Terror in April 1794. Liberated after Thermidor, he passed into the royalist camp. (Darcel ed.)]

experience of centuries do not permit us to doubt. This privilege of aristocracy is really a natural law.[10]

Now it is one of the great advantages of monarchical government that in it the aristocracy loses, as much as the nature of things permits, all that can be offensive to the lower classes. It is important to understand the reasons for this.

1. This kind of aristocracy is legal; it is an integral part of the government, everyone knows this, and it does not awaken in anyone's mind the idea of usurpation and injustice. In republics, on the contrary, distinctions between persons exist as in monarchies, but they are harsher and more insulting because they are not the work of the law, and because popular opinion regards them as a habitual insurrection against the principle of equality recognized by the Constitution.

There was perhaps as much distinction between persons, as much arrogance, as much *aristocracy* properly speaking, in Geneva as in Vienna. But what a difference in cause and effect!

2. Since the influence of a hereditary aristocracy is inevitable (the experience of every age leaves no doubt on his point), nothing better can be imagined to deprive this influence of what it can have that might be too tiresome for the pride of the lower classes than to remove all insurmountable barriers between families in the state, and to allow none to be humiliated by a distinction that they can never enjoy.

Now this is precisely the case in a monarchy founded on good laws. There is no family whose head's merit cannot raise it from the second to the first rank, and even independently of this flattering achievement and before the family acquires through time the influence that is its due, all the posts in the state, or at least many of them, are open to merit, which take the place of hereditary distinctions for the family, and moves it toward such distinctions.[11]

This movement of general ascension that pushes all families towards the sovereign and that constantly replenishes all the voids that are left by those that die out, this movement, I say, involves a salutary

[10] "The high magistrates come from the nobility and the wealthy." (Aristotle *Politics* 2.6.19.) "I think the best government is that which ... gives the power to the aristocracy." (Cicero *The Laws* 3.17.37.) [Loeb.] "Leading men of the community, and who in the time of assembly *were called by name*." (Numbers 16:2.)

[11] *Lettres d'un royaliste savoisien*, letter 4, p. 193. [Joseph de Maistre cites his own *Lettres d'un royaliste savoisien*. Here is the passage in question: "Every day, high positions are bringing into the nobility men who obtain a marked fame ... All careers are open to merit." *OC*, 7:169–70. (Darcel ed.)]

emulation, animates the flame of honour, and turns all individual ambitions towards the good of the state.

3. This order of things appears still more perfect when one reflects that the aristocracy of birth and office, already rendered very gentle by the right that belongs to every family and to every individual to enjoy the same distinctions in turn, again loses all that it could have that is too offensive for the lower classes, by the universal supremacy of the monarch before whom no citizen is more powerful than another. The man of the people, who feels insignificant when he measures himself against a great lord, measures himself against the sovereign, and the title of *subject*, which submits both to the same power and the same justice, is a kind of equality that quiets the inevitable pangs of self-esteem.

Under these last two aspects, aristocratic government cedes to monarchy. In the latter, a unique family is separated from all the others by opinion, and is considered, or can be so considered, as belonging to another nature. The greatness of this family humiliates no one, because none can be compared to it. In the first case, on the contrary, sovereignty residing on the heads of several men does not make the same impression on minds, and individuals that chance has made members of the sovereign are great enough to excite envy, but not great enough to stifle it.

In a government of several, the sovereignty is not at all A UNITY; and although the parts that make it up form a theoretical UNITY, they are far from making the same impression on the mind. The human imagination does not grasp this whole, which is only a metaphysical being; on the contrary, it delights in separating each unit of the general unity, and the subject has less respect for a sovereignty whose separate parts are not high enough above him. It follows that sovereignty in these kinds of government does not have the same *intensity* or, in consequence, the same moral force.

From this point as well it follows that offices, that is to say power delegated by the sovereign, gives the government of one an extraordinary consideration that is quite specific to monarchy.

In a government of several persons, the offices occupied by the members of the sovereign enjoy the consideration attached to this quality. It is the man who honours the office; but, among the subjects of these governments, offices elevate those who occupy them very little above their fellows, and do not approach the members of the government.

In monarchy, offices, reflecting a brighter light on the people, are more dazzling; they furnish an immense career open to all kinds of talents and fill up the void that without them would be opened between

the nobility and the people in general. The exercise of delegated power always takes the official out of the class where he had been fixed by birth; but the exercise of high office in particular brings a new man into the first order and prepares him for nobility.

If the individual placed by the caprice of birth in the second order does not want to content himself with the possibility of passing into the first, and with the means, limited only by time, that are furnished to him by offices for assisting this process, as much as the nature of things permits, clearly this man is sick, and by consequence, one has nothing to say to him.

All things considered, one can maintain without exaggeration that monarchy allows *as much* and perhaps even *more liberty* and *equality* than any other government. This does not mean that *polyarchy* does not include a large number of men more free than there are, in general, in monarchies; but that monarchy gives or can give more liberty and equality to a greater number of men, and this is what must be remarked.

As for the vigour of these governments, no one has recognized this better than Rousseau. "All respond to the same motivation," he says, "all the mechanisms of the machine are in the same hands; everything moves toward the same goal; there are no opposing movements that are mutually destructive; and there is no constitution imaginable in which a lesser effort produces a greater action. Archimedes sitting tranquilly on the shore and effortlessly pulling a huge Vessel over the waves is my image of a skillful monarch governing his vast States from his study, and setting everything in motion while appearing immobile himself."[12]

The word *skilful* is superfluous in this piece. Monarchical government is precisely the one that best does without the skill of the sovereign, and this perhaps is even the first of its advantages. One could even make more of Rousseau's comparison, and make it more exact. The glory of Archimedes was not to have pulled Hieron's galley behind him, but to have imagined the machine capable of executing this movement. Now, monarchy is precisely this machine. Men have not made it, for they create nothing; it is the work of the *eternal Geometer* who has no need of our consent to make his plans; and the greatest merit of the engine is that a mediocre man can set it in motion.

This word KING is a talisman, a magical power that gives central direction to all forces and all talents. If the sovereign has great talents,

[12] *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. vi. [*CW*, 4:176.]

and if his individual action can immediately initiate general motion that is undoubtedly good, but in place of *his person*, his *name* suffices.

As long as the aristocracy is healthy, the name of the sovereign sacred to it, and it loves the monarchy passionately, the State is unshakeable, whatever be the qualities of the king. But once it loses its greatness, its pride, its energy, its faith, the spirit withdraws, the monarchy is dead, and its cadaver is left to the *worms*.

Tacitus said in speaking of republican governments: "*A few communities, ... after a surfeit of kings, decided for government by laws.*"[13] He thus opposed the rule of laws to that of a man, as if the one excluded the other. This passage could furnish an interesting dissertation on the differences between ancient and modern monarchies. Tacitus, secretly irritated against government by one, could undoubtedly have exaggerated; but it is also true that all the monarchies formed in Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire have a particular character that distinguishes them from the monarchies of antiquity. If one excepts the Greek monarchies of Epirus and Macedonia, antiquity only makes known to us monarchies foreign to Europe. Asia, especially, eternally the same, never knew anything but the government of one, modified in a manner that suited it, but that does not suit us. Even the Greek monarchy was not our own, and the government of the Roman emperors not being a monarchy properly speaking, but rather a military and elective despotism, most of the reflections made on these sorts of governments do not apply to European monarchy.

Perhaps it would be possible to use metaphysical reasons to explain why the ancient monarchies were constituted differently than ours, but this would be to fall into the too common fault of talking about everything in relation to everything. The difference of which I speak is a fact that it suffices to recall.

Without insisting on the nuances, I will only indicate one characteristic trait: this is that antiquity did not challenge the right of kings to condemn to death; all the pages of history present judgements of this kind that historians report with no sign of disapproval. This is also the same in Asia, where no one disputes this right of sovereigns.

Among us, ideas are different. A king, on his private authority, can make a man die, and European wisdom will counsel neither retaliation or rebellion, but everyone will say: "*This is a crime.*" On this there is not two ways of thinking, and opinion is so strong that it preserves us sufficiently.

[13] *Annals* 3.26.3 [Loeb.]

In general, even while agreeing that all the powers reside eminently on the head of kings, the European does not believe that they have the right personally to exercise any branch of the judicial power; and, in effect, they do not get involved in it. Abuses in this regard prove nothing; universal conscience has always protested. Here is the great character of our governments' physiognomy. Each European monarchy no doubt has its own particular traits, and, for example, it would not be surprising to find a little *Arabism* in Spain and Portugal, but all these monarchies have a family style that brings them together, and one can say of them with the greatest truth:

... Facies non omnibus una;
Nec diversa tamen, qualem decet esse sororum.[14]

I will certainly not deny that Christianity has modified all these governments for the better, nor that the public law of Europe has been greatly improved by this salutary law; but it also necessary to notice our common origin and the general character of the northern peoples who replaced the Roman Empire in Europe.

"The government of the Germans," Hume has rightly said, "and that of all the northern nations who established themselves on the ruins of Rome, was always extremely free ... The military despotism which had taken place in the Roman empire, and which, previously to the irruption of these conquerors, had sunk the genius of men, and destroyed every noble principle of science and virtue, was unable to resist the vigorous efforts of a free people; and Europe, as from a new epoch, ... shook off the base servitude to arbitrary will and authority under which she had so long labored. The free constitutions then established, however impaired by the encroachments of succeeding princes, still preserve an air of independence and legal administration, which distinguished European nations; and if that part of the globe maintained sentiments of liberty, honor, equity, and valor superior to the rest of mankind, it owes these advantages chiefly to the seed implanted by those generous barbarians."[15]

These reflections contain a striking truth. It is in the midst of the forests and ice of the North that our governments were born. There is where the European character was born, and although it has since received some modifications in the different latitudes of Europe, we are

[14] ["They have not all the same appearance, and yet not altogether different; as it should be with sisters." Ovid *Metamorphoses* 2.13–14. Loeb.]

[15] [David] Hume's *History of England*, Bk. I, Appendix I: *The anglo-saxon government and manners.*]

still all brothers, *durum genus.*[16] The fever that is currently affecting all the nations in this part of the globe is a great lesson for statesmen: *et documenta damus qua simus origine nati.*[17]

It is in Asia that it is said: *It is better to die than to live; it is better to sleep than awake; it is better to be seated than to walk, etc.*

Reverse these maxims; you will have the European character. The need to act and an eternal inquietude are our two characteristic traits. The rage for enterprises, for discoveries, and for voyages exists only in Europe.[18] I do not know what indefinable force agitates us without respite. Movement is the moral life as well as the physical life of the European. For us, the greatest misfortune is not poverty, nor enslavement, nor sickness, nor even death; it is repose.

One of the greatest results of this character is that the European can hardly endure being excluded from government. The inhabitant of Asia does not seek to penetrate the dark cloud that envelops or forms the majesty of the monarch. His master is a god to him, and he has no other relation with this superior being than that of prayer. The laws of the monarch are oracles. His graces are celestial gifts, and his anger is a calamity of invincible nature. The subject who prides himself in being called a *slave* receives a benefit from him like dew, and the rope like a thunder clap.

See however how the supreme wisdom has balanced these terrible elements of oriental power. This absolute monarch can be deposed; his right to demand the head of anyone who displeases him is not disputed, but often his own is demanded. Sometimes the laws deprive him of the sceptre and of life; sometimes sedition comes to seize him on this elevated throne and throw him into the dust. How then is there to be found in the same souls weakness that prostrates itself and energy that strangles? There is no other answer but that of Dante:

So wishes the One who can do all he wishes.

[16] ["A stony race." Virgil *Georgics* 1.63. Trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 1940.]

[17] ["And we give proof from what origin we are sprung." Ovid *Metamorphoses* 1:415. Loeb.]

[18] A modern theosophe remarked, in a book that everyone can read with pleasure as a masterpiece of elegance, that all the great *navigators were Christians* (*Homme de désir*, 1790, p. 70, § 40); he could even have said *European.* [The author of *Homme de désir* was Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin (1743–1803), whom Maistre always admired. In a 1790 letter he defended Saint-Martin's orthodoxy (*OC*, 9:8–9), and in his *St Petersburg Dialogues* Maistre described him as "the best instructed, wisest, and most elegant of modern theosophes." (Lebrun ed., 331)]

But he has wanted to do otherwise for us. Seditions are rare events for us; and the wisest nation of Europe in making a fundamental law of the inviolability of sovereigns has only sanctioned general opinion in this part of the world. We do not want sovereigns to be judged, we do not want to judge them. The exceptions to this rule are rare; they only take place in an attack of fever, and as soon as we are well, we call them *crimes*. Providence has said to all the sovereigns of Europe: "*You will not be judged*," but it immediately adds: "*You will not judge*." That is the price of this inestimable privilege.

Tacitus, in describing with his vigorous brush the prostration of the Romans under the sceptre of the emperors, put stress on that universal recklessness that is the first fruit of servitude *and that changes politics into something foreign*.[19]

It is precisely this recklessness that is absent in the character of modern Europeans. Always uneasy, always alarmed, the veil that hides from them the activities of governments vexes them. Submissive subjects, rebel slaves, they want to ennoble obedience, and, as the price of their submission, they ask the right to complain and to enlighten power.

Under the names of the *Field of March* or of *May*, of *Parliament*, of *Estates*, of *Cortes*, of *Establishments*, of *Diets*, of *Senates*, of *Councils*, etc., all the peoples of modern Europe have involved themselves more or less in administration under the rule of their kings.

The French, who exaggerate everything, have drawn from this truth of fact equally deadly theoretical conclusions, of which the first is "that the king's national council once was and must again be a co-legislator."[20]

I do not want to examine here whether Charlemagne's Parlement really legislated; great publicists have rendered the question very problematic. But supposing the affirmative proved: because assemblies in Charlemagne's time would have been *co-legislative*, would it be necessary to conclude that they had to be such today? Not at all, and the contrary conclusion could well be more sensible. In politics it is always necessary to take account of what the jurisconsults called the last state, and while we need not take this phrase too narrowly, no more need we give it too large an extension.

[19] *Incuria reipublicæ velut alienæ*. [This would appear to be a version of *inscitia rei publicae ut alienae*. Tacitus *Histories* 1.1. The Loeb translation is "men were ignorant of politics as being not any concern of theirs."]

[20] As can be seen clearly enough, I speak only of the monarchial systems that deviate more or less from what they call the *old regime*.

When the Franks conquered the Gauls, by their mixture with the Gauls they formed a hybrid nation; but we understand well enough that this people was at first more Frankish than Gallic, and that the combined action of time and climate each day made them more Gallic than Frankish, so that it would be both very imprudent and very ignorant to look for the public law of modern France in the capitularies of the Carolingians (at least word for word).

Let us divest ourselves of all prejudice and party spirit, let us renounce exaggerated ideas and all the theoretical dreams arising from the French fever, and European good sense will agree on the following propositions:

1. The king is sovereign; no one shares sovereignty with him, and all powers emanate from him.

2. His person is inviolable; no one has the right to depose or judge him.

3. He does not have the right to condemn to death, nor even to any corporal punishment. The power that punishes derives from him, and that is enough.

4. If he inflicts exile or prison in cases where reasons of state can prevent a judicial hearing, he cannot be too cautious, nor should he act without the advice of an enlightened council.

5. The king cannot judge in civil cases; the magistrates alone, in the name of the sovereign, can pronounce on property and contracts.

6. By means of certain differently composed bodies, councils, or assemblies, subjects have the right to instruct the king about their needs, to denounce abuses to him, and legally to communicate to him their *grievances* and their *very humble* remonstrances.

It is in these sacred laws, the more truly constitutional in that they are written only in men's hearts, and more particularly in the paternal communication between prince and subjects, that we find the true character of European monarchy.

Whatever the exalted and blind pride of the eighteenth century has to say, this is all that we need. These elements, combined in different ways, produce an infinity of nuances in monarchical governments. One understands, for example, that the men charged with carrying the representations or the grievances of subjects to the foot of the throne can form *bodies* or *assemblies*, that the members who compose these assemblies or bodies can vary in number and rank, and in the nature and extent of their powers; that the method of election, the frequency and duration of sessions, etc., also vary the number of these combina-

tions: *facies non omnibus una.*[21] But you will always find this same general character, that is to say, chosen men always legally carrying to the father the complaints and wishes of the family: *nec diversa tamen.*[22]

Let us completely reject the judgement of men who are passionate or too systematic, and address ourselves to that precious good sense that makes and preserves all that is good in the world. Interrogate the European who is best-instructed, wisest, even the most religious, and the greatest friend of royalty, and ask him: "Is it just, is it expedient, that the king governs solely by means of his ministers? That his subjects as a body have no legal means of communicating with him? That abuses persist until some individual be enlightened and powerful enough to restore order or an insurrection brings justice?" Without hesitation, he will answer you: "No." Moreover, what is really constitutional in every government is not what is written on paper; it is what is in the universal conscience. What generally displeases us, what does not accord with our character and our ancient, incontestable, and universal usages, is a ministerial government or vizierate. Oriental immobility accommodates itself very well to this kind of government and even refuses all others, but the *audacious race of Japhet* does not want it, because in effect this form does not suit it. From every side one hears the cry of despotism, but often public opinion is misled, and takes one thing for another. They complain of the excess of power; it seems to me that it is rather that we are offended by its displacement and its weakness. Once the nation is condemned to silence, once only single individuals can speak, it is clear that each individual by himself is weaker than those in power; and as the first ambition of man is to obtain power, and his great fault is to abuse it, it follows that all the depositories of delegated power not being constrained by anything, and not reacting directly to opinion, seize the sceptre for themselves and divide it into small fragments proportional to the importance of their offices, so that everyone is king except the king. These reflections explain why, in a majority of monarchies, one can hear complaints at one and the same time of despotism and the weakness of the government. These two complaints contradict each other only in appearance. The people complain of despotism, because they are not strong enough against the disordered action of delegated power; and they complain of the weakness of the government, because they no longer see a centre, because the king is not king enough, because the monarchy is changing

21 ["They have not all the same experience." Ovid *Metamorphoses* 2:13. Loeb.]

22 "And yet not altogether different." Ibid., 2:14.]

into an irksome aristocracy; because every subject who does not participate or who participates only a little in this aristocracy, always sees a king beside him, and frets at his nullity, so that the government is both hated as despotic and despised as weak.

The remedy for these great evils is not difficult to find: it is only a question of reinforcing the authority of the king and of restoring to him his quality as a father by re-establishing the old and legitimate communications between him and the large family. Once the nation possesses some means of making its voice heard legally, it becomes impossible for vice and incapacity to get hold of offices, or to retain them for a long time, and the direct communication with the king gives monarchical government that paternal character necessary to monarchy in Europe.

How many mistakes power has committed! And how often has it ignored the means to conserve itself! Man is insatiable for power; he is infinite in his desires, and, always discontented with what he has, he loves only what he has not. People complain about the despotism of princes; they should complain about that of *man*. We are all born despots, from the most absolute monarch of Asia to the child who smothers a bird with his hand for the pleasure of seeing something in the world weaker than himself. There is no man who does not abuse power, and experience proves that the most abominable despots, if they come to seize the sceptre, will be precisely those who rant against despotism. But the author of nature has put limits to the abuse of power: he has willed that it destroys itself once it exceeds its natural limits. He has engraved this law everywhere, and in the physical world as in the moral world, it surrounds us and speaks to us at every moment. Look at this firearm: up to a certain point, the more you lengthen it, the more you will increase its effect. But if you pass a certain limit, you will see the effect diminish. Look at this telescope: up to a certain point, the more you increase its dimensions, the more it will produce its effect; but beyond that, invincible nature will turn against you the efforts you make to improve the instrument. This is a natural image of power. To conserve itself it must restrain itself, and it must always avoid the point where its ultimate effort leads to its last moment.

Assuredly, I do not like *popular* assemblies better than anyone else; but French madness must not disgust us with the truth and wisdom to be found in a happy mean. If there is an incontestable maxim, it is that in all seditions, insurrections, and revolutions, *the people always begin by being right, and always end by being wrong*. It is false that every nation must have its *national assembly* in the French sense; it is false that every individual must be eligible for the national council; it is

even false that he can be an elector without any distinction of rank or fortune; it is false that this council should be a co-legislator; finally, it is false that it must be composed in the same way in different countries. Because these exaggerated proposals are false, does it follow that no one has the right to speak for the common good in the name of the community, and that we are prohibited from being right because the French committed a great act of madness? I do not understand this consequence. What observer would not be frightened by the actual state of minds all over Europe? Whatever the cause of such a general impulse, it exists, and it menaces all sovereignties.

Certainly, it is the duty of statesmen to seek to ward off this storm; and certainly too they will not succeed by frightened immobility or by recklessness. It is up to the wise men of all nations to reflect profoundly on the ancient laws of monarchies, the *good customs* of each nation, and the general character of European peoples. It is in these sacred sources that they will find remedies appropriate to our misfortunes, and the wise means of regeneration infinitely removed from the absurd theories and exaggerated ideas that have done us so much harm.

The first and perhaps sole source of all the evils that we suffer is contempt for the old, or, what amounts to the same thing, contempt for experience; whereas *there is nothing better than what has been proved,* as Bossuet put it very well. The laziness and vain ignorance of this century accommodates itself much better to theories that cost nothing and that flatter pride, than to the lessons of moderation and obedience that it would have to learn painfully from history. In all the sciences, but especially in politics, whose numerous and changing elements are so difficult to seize in their entirety, theory is almost always contradicted by experience. May Eternal Wisdom shine its rays on men destined to rule the destiny of others! May the peoples of Europe also close their ears to the voice of sophists, and, turning their eyes from all theoretical illusions, fix them only on these venerable laws that are rarely written, and of which it is impossible to assign either dates or authors, and which the people have not made, but which have made peoples.

These laws come from God: the rest is human!

CHAPTER THREE

Of Aristocracy

Aristocratic government is a monarchy whose throne is vacant. *Sovereignty there is in regency.*

The regents who administer sovereignty being hereditary, it is completely separated from the people, and in this, aristocratic government approaches monarchy. It cannot match it in vigour, but for wisdom it has no equal.

Antiquity has not left us a model of this form of government. In Rome and Sparta, as in all governments, the aristocracy undoubtedly played a great role, but it did not reign alone.

It can be said in general that all non-monarchic governments are aristocratic, since democracy is only elective aristocracy.

"The first societies," Rousseau says, "governed themselves aristocratically."[1] This is false, if, by the words *first societies*, Rousseau means *the first peoples, the first nations* properly speaking, which were all governed by kings. All observers have remarked that monarchy was the most ancient government known.

And if he intends to speak of the first gatherings that preceded the formation of peoples into national bodies, he speaks of what he does not know and what no one can know. Moreover, there was then no government properly speaking: man was not yet what he had to be; this point has been sufficiently discussed in my first book.

"The savages of North America," he also says, "still govern themselves in this manner, and *are very well governed.*"[2] The savages of America are not completely *men* precisely because they are *savages*; moreover they are visibly degraded beings, physically and morally. On

[1] *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. v. [*CW*, 4:174.]

[2] Ibid. [*CW*, 4:174. Maistre's italics.]

this point, at least, I do not see that anyone has answered the ingenious author of the *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains.*[3]

It is also false that these savages are governed aristocratically. Tacitus told the history of all savage peoples when he said: "They take their kings on the ground of birth, their generals on the basis of courage: the authority of their kings is not unlimited or arbitary."[4] Tacitus's book on the mores of the Germans and Father de Charlevoix's historical journal of travels in America present a host of analogies.[5] Among these peoples we find not aristocratic government, but the rudiments of moderate monarchy.

Leaving out the natural aristocracy that results from physical strength and talents, which it is useless to dispute, there are only two sorts of aristocracy, elective and hereditary, as Rousseau observes; but the same restricted notions and same childish prejudices that led him astray about monarchy, similarly distorted his thinking about aristocratic government.

"The second [elective aristocracy]," he says, "is the best; it is Aristocracy properly so-called."[6] This is not an error, a misunderstanding, or a distraction; this is an absolute absence of reasoning, and a shameful blunder.

Monarchy is sovereignty vested in one man alone; and aristocracy is sovereignty vested in several men (more or less). Since elective monarchy is the weakest and most tumultuous of governments, and since experience has shown the obvious superiority of hereditary monarchy, it follows, by an incontestable analogy, that hereditary

[3] [The author of *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains* (1768–69) was Cornelius de Pauw, who developed the thesis of the genetic inferiority of American Indians due to climate. Maistre, who often cited Pauw in his notebooks, found in this free thinker an ally against Rousseau. (Darcel ed.)]

[4] Tacitus *Germany* 7. [Trans. Maurice Hutton, Loeb Classical Library 1970]

[5] *Si Germanorum Canadensiumque principum potestatem conferas, eamdem reperies* [If you compare the power of the German and Canadian leaders, you will find it is the same]. (See Father de Charlevoix, letter 18; Brottier, ad. *Tac. de Mor. Germ*, vii et passim) [Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, S.J., was the author of *Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle France, avec le Journal historique d'un voyage dans l'Amérique septentrionale* (Paris: Giffart 1744, 3 vols.) (Darcel ed.) The "Brottier" reference would be to a four-volume edition of Tacitus edited by Gabriel Brotier (Paris 1771); Vol. 4 includes "Notes et emendations ad librum de moribus Germanorum."]

[6] *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. v. [*CW*, 4:175.]

aristocracy is preferable to elective. Let us repeat with Tacitus that *it is better to accept a sovereign than to look for one.*[7]

"[Election is] a means by which probity, enlightenment, experience, and all other reasons for public preference and esteem become so many fresh *guarantees* of being wisely governed."[8]

This argument falls directly on hereditary monarchy, and we have monarchs who inherit the throne before reaching the age of reason.

"When power was passed on together with goods from father to children ... the Government was made hereditary, and there were Senators only twenty years old."[9]

Later, he will say, in speaking of hereditary monarchy: "*men risk having children* [...] *for their leaders.*"[10] It is always the same sagacity; however we must observe that the argument is worst with respect to hereditary aristocracy, since the inexperience of *twenty-year old senators* is amply compensated for by the wisdom of their elders.

Since the occasion presents itself naturally, I will observe that the mixture of *children* and *men* is precisely one of the most beautiful features of aristocratic government. All roles are distributed wisely in the world: that of the young is to do good, and that of old age is to prevent evil. The impetuosity of young men, who demand only action and creation, is very useful to the State; but they are too likely to innovate and destroy, and they would do much evil without the elderly, who are there to stop them. The latter in their turn oppose even useful reforms; they are too inflexible, they do not know how to accommodate themselves to circumstances, and sometimes a *twenty-year old senator* can very well be placed beside another of eighty.

All things considered, hereditary aristocratic government is perhaps the most advantageous to what is called the *people.* Sovereignty is concentrated enough to impose itself on them, but as it has fewer needs and less splendour, it asks less of them. If it is sometimes timid, this is because it is never imprudent; malcontents can be found between the people and the sovereign, but their sufferings are not the government's doing, and are only a matter of opinion; this is an inestimable advantage for the masses whose happiness is a security.

The mortal enemy of experience obviously thinks otherwise; according to him, hereditary aristocracy "*is the worst of all Govern-*

7 Tacitus [*Histories* 1.56. See note 16 to Bk.I, chap. 7, p. 72 above.].

8 *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. v. [*CW*, 4:175. Maistre's italics.]

9 Ibid. [*CW*, 4:175.]

10 Ibid., chap. vi. [*CW*, 4:179.]

ments."[11] The sentiment that dominates all Rousseau's works is a certain plebeian anger that excites him against every kind of superiority. The energetic submission of the wise man bends nobly under the indispensable empire of social distinctions, and never does he appear greater than when he bows; but Rousseau has nothing at all of this loftiness. Weak and surly, he spent his life spouting insults to the great, as he would have offered the same to the people if he had been born a great lord.

His character explains his political heresies; it is not the truth that inspires him, it is ill humour. Whenever he sees greatness and especially hereditary greatness, he fumes and loses his faculty of reason; this happens to him especially when he is talking about aristocratic government.

To say that this kind of government is the worst of all is to say nothing; it must be proved. Venice and Bern are the first to come to mind; and we are not surprised to learn that there is no government worse than that of these two states.

But history and experience never embarrass Rousseau. He begins by posing general maxims that he does not prove; then he says: *I have proved.* If experience contradicts him, he hardly worries about it or else he extricates himself by some antic. Berne, for example, does not embarrass him at all. Do you want to know why? It "has maintained itself through the extreme wisdom of its Senate. It is a very honourable and very dangerous exception."[12] However Berne's Senate forms precisely the essence of its government. It is the head of the body politic; it is the principal part without which this government would not be what it is. This is just the same as if Rousseau had said: Hereditary aristocratic government is detestable; the general esteem accorded Berne's government for several centuries does not contradict my theory, for what makes this government not bad, is its excellence. Oh what profundity![13]

[11] Ibid., chap. v. [*CW*, 4:175.]

[12] *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. v, [note]. [*CW*, 4:175.]

[13] Montesquieu rendered a particular homage to Berne's government. "There is at present," he said, "in the world a republic that no one knows and which in secret and in silence increases its strength every day. It is certain that if it ever succeeds to the state of greatness that its wisdom destines it for, it will necessarily change its laws, etc." (*Grandeur et décadence des Romains*, chap. IX). Let us leave his prophecies aside; I only believe in those of the Bible. But it seems to me that we owe a compliment to a government wise enough to get itself praised by wisdom and folly at the same time.

Rousseau's judgement on Venice is no less curious: "Venice," he says, has fallen "into a hereditary Aristocracy; ... [it] has long been a dissolute State."[14] Assuredly Europe knew nothing of this; but what everyone knows is that Venice has lasted a thousand years, and that its power cast a shadow on its neighbours when it was threatened by the League of Cambrai, and that it had the skill to escape this peril at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The Venetian government has undoubtedly aged, like all European governments, but the youth of Milo of Crotona[15] renders his old age venerable, and no one has the right to insult it.

Venice has shone with every kind of splendour: by its laws, its commerce, its arms, its arts and letters; its monetary system is an example to Europe. It played a dazzling role in the middle ages.[16] If Vasco de Gama rounded the Cape of Storms, if commerce took another route, this was not the Senate's fault. And if at the moment Venice is obliged to put prudence in place of force, again, let us respect her old age; after thirteen hundred years of life and health, one can be ill, and one can even die with honour.[17]

Declamations on the state inquisition, which Rousseau calls *a bloody tribunal*,[18] are scarecrows for weak women. Has it not been said that the State inquisitors shed blood to amuse themselves? This imposing magistracy is necessary since it exists, and it cannot be so terrible since it belongs to one of the most gentle, most playful, and most likeable people in Europe. The malevolent and the thoughtless can only complain about themselves when they go wrong, but it is a constant

[14] *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. v, note. [*CW*, 4:175.]

[15] [Greek athlete who won three straight Olympic wreaths. He is said to have carried a four-year-old heifer through the stadium at Olymphia, and eaten it whole afterwards. As an old man he attempted to tear an oak tree apart, but was eaten by wolves when the parts of the tree closed on his hands and held him defenceless.]

[16] Count Carli, one of Italy's ornaments, said curious things about the ancient splendour of Venice; one can consult his works of STUNNING erudition, *sed Græcis incognitas qui sua tantum mirantur* ["but (these are) unknown to the Greeks, who admire only their own things." Tacitus *Annals* 2.88 Loeb.]. [Count Rinaldo Carli (1720–1795) was a learned antiquarian; his complete works were published in Milan, 1784–1795, in 19 volumes. (Darcel ed.)]

[17] "Venice is the only (republic) that lasted a thousand years; successful by Luck, but also by its laws and its institutions, which are like the chains that still keep it from falling. We hope that it lasts and that it prospers, and we encourage it." Justus Lipsius, *Monita et exempla politica* [1630]. [Justus Lipsius (1547–1606) was a philologist and learned humanist. (Darcel ed.)]

[18] *Contrat social*, Bk. IV, chap. v. [*CW*, 4:212.]

fact, attested to by all sober travellers, that there perhaps does not exist any country where the people are happier, calmer, and freer than those of Venice. The foreigner shares this liberty, and at the moment, it is under the laws of this peaceful government that the honourable victims of the French Revolution enjoy the kindest and most generous hospitality.

If sometimes the state inquisitors commanded severe executions, severity did not exclude justice, and blood is often shed to save blood. As for errors and injustices, they are everywhere; but the inquisitors of state did not give the hemlock to Morosini on his return from the Peloponnesus.[19]

Rousseau, in saying that Venice *fell* into hereditary aristocracy, proves that he knew little of the growth of empires. If he had known, instead of *fell*, he would have said *attained*. While the Venetians were only unhappy refugees, living in cabins on the islands destined one day to support so many palaces, it is quite obvious their constitution was not mature; to speak rightly, they did not have one, since they did not yet enjoy absolute independence, which was contested for a long time. Already in 697, however, they had a chief powerful enough to have left the memory that he was the sovereign; moreover, wherever there is a chief, at least a non-despotic chief, there is a hereditary aristocracy between the chief and the people. That aristocracy was formed imperceptibly like a language and matured in silence. Finally, at the beginning of the twelfth century, it took a legal form, and government was what it had to be. Under this form of sovereignty, Venice filled the world with its fame. To say that this government *degenerated* by achieving its natural dimensions in this way,[20] is to say that the Roman government *degenerated* when the institution of the tribunes, as I have noted citing Cicero, gave legal form to the constitutional but disordered power of the people.

In any case, if we believe Rousseau, it was not only Venice that *fell* into hereditary aristocracy. Berne experienced the same fate; its government even *contracted*, and in consequence it *degenerated*, the day the people made the mistake of abandoning the election of

[19] [Francesco Morosini (1618–1694), one of the great captains of his century, was a member of the Venetian Senate and then Doge. The unfortunate hero of the seige of Candia, Morosini was returned to Venice in 1669 with the remnants of the garrison and the population of the citadel, accused of treason to his country and threatened by the people. He was later rehabilitated and became Doge in 1688. (Darcel ed.)]

[20] *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. x, note. [*CW*, 4:175.]

magistrates *to the prince*.[21] If one asks in what history this important fact is to be found, and how Berne *fell* from democracy or elected aristocracy to hereditary aristocracy, no one can answer; no one has been heard to speak of this *fall* revealed at the end of time in the *Social Contract*. This Rousseau is a strange man! Sometimes he contradicts history, and sometimes he makes it.

In treating of hereditary aristocratic governments, we must not pass over Genoa in silence. From certain points of view, it may be that it cannot sustain comparison with other governments of the same type; it may be that the people were less happy than in Venice or Berne. Nevertheless, Genoa had its great moments and its great men; moreover, every people always has the government and the happiness it deserves.

After having examined the action of hereditary aristocracy in countries of a certain extent, it is good to look at its action in a more restricted theatre and to study it within the walls of a city. Lucca and Ragusa come to mind immediately. It is said that democracy is especially suited to small states; it would be more correct to say that only small states can support it. However hereditary aristocracy suits them perfectly. Here are two small states, isolated in the middle of an insignificant territory, peaceful, happy, and distinguished by a host of talents. Geneva, with its turbulent democracy, presents an interesting object of comparison. Let us throw these political *grains* on the scale, and without prejudice let us see on which side we find more wisdom and stability.

It is proved by theory and even more by experience that hereditary aristocratic government is perhaps the most favourable to the mass of the people, that it has a great deal of consistency, wisdom, and stability, and that it is adapted to countries of very different sizes. Like all governments, it is good wherever it is established, and it is a crime to turn its subjects against it.

[21] Ibid., chap. v, note. When Rousseau sees a truth he never sees all of it, and in this case his decisions are more dangerous, for four-fifths of his readers, than complete blunders. For example, when he says that the government that *contracts* is *corrupted*, he is right and wrong; he is right with respect to democratic government, which deviates from its nature; he is wrong with respect to aristocratic government, which approaches its nature. In the latter case, it is a movement of organization; in the first, it is a movement of dissolution.

CHAPTER FOUR

Of Democracy

Pure democracy does not exist any more than absolute despotism. "In the strict sense of the term," Rousseau has very well said, "a genuine Democracy has never existed, and never will exist. It is contrary to the natural order that the majority govern and the minority be governed."[1]

The idea of a whole people being sovereign and legislator so strongly shocks good sense that Greek political writers, who must have understood something about freedom, never spoke of democracy as a legitimate government, at least when they intended to speak exactly. Aristotle, especially, defines democracy as the *excess of republic (politia)*, just as despotism is the *excess of monarchy*.[2]

If there is no democracy properly speaking, one can say as much of perfect despotism, which is also an imaginary entity. "It is an error to believe that any human authority exists in the world that is despotic in all respects. There has never been and there will never be such a thing, for the most immense power is always limited in some way."[3]

To clarify our ideas, however, nothing prevents us from considering these two forms of government as two theoretical extremes that all possible governments approach more or less. I believe I can define democracy in the strict sense as *an association of men without sovereignty*.

[1] *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. iv. [*CW*, 4:173.]

[2] This is the comment of an English author who collected some good materials for a history of Athens. (See Young's *History of Athens*.) [William Young was the author of *The History of Athens politically and philosophically considered, with the view to and investigation of the immediate causes of elevation and decline* (London: Robson 1786). For Aristotle, see *Politics* 3.7, where Aristotle speaks of tyranny as a deviation from monarchy, oligarchy from aristocracy, and democracy from a republic properly speaking. (Darcel ed.)]

[3] Montesquieu, *Grandeur et décadence des Romains*, chap. xxii.

"When the entire people," says Rousseau, "enacts something concerning the entire people, it considers only itself ... Then the subject matter of the enactment is general like the will that enacts. It is this act that I call a LAW."[4] What Rousseau calls eminently *law* is precisely what is unable to bear the name.

There is a passage from Tacitus on the origin of governments that deserves our attention. After having recounted, like others, the story of the golden age, and repeating that vice, by its introduction into the world, required the establishment of a public force, he adds: "Then sovereignties were born, and, for many nations, they have had no end. Other nations preferred laws, either from the beginning or after they had tired of kings."[5]

I spoke earlier of the opposition between kings and laws; what I observe here is that in thus opposing sovereignties to republics, Tacitus makes it understood that there is no real *sovereignty* in republics. His subject did not lead him to follow up this idea, which is very true.

Since no nation, any more than any individual, can possess a coercive power over itself, if there exists a democracy in theoretical purity, clearly there would be no sovereignty at all in this state, for it is impossible to understand the word sovereignty in any other sense than of a restraining power that acts on the *subject*, and that is placed outside the subject. So the word *subject*, which is a relative term, is foreign to republics, because there is no sovereign properly speaking in a republic, and there cannot be a *subject* without a *sovereign*, just as there cannot be a *son* without a *father*.

Even in aristocratic governments, where sovereignty is much more palpable than in democracies, one still avoids the word *subject*; and the ear prefers lighter words that imply no exaggeration.

In all the countries of the world, there are voluntary associations of men who come together because of common interests or benevolence. These men voluntarily submit themselves to certain rules that they observe in so far as they find them good; they even submit themselves to certain penalties that they incur when they have contravened the statutes of the association. However these statutes have no other sanction than the will of those who adopted them; and once they find

[4] *Contrat social*, Bk. II, chap. vi. [*CW*, 4:153. Maistre's small capitals.]

[5] "But when equality began to be outworn, and ambition and violence gained ground in place of modesty and self-effacement, there came a crop of despotisms, which with many nations has remained perennial. A few communities, either from the outset or after a surfeit of kings, decided for government by laws." Tacitus *Annals* 3.26. [Loeb.]

themselves in disagreement, no one among them has coercive force to constrain them.

It suffices to enlarge the concept of these associations to form a just idea of true democracy. The ordinances that emanate from the people constituted in this way are regulations, and not laws. The law is so little the will of all, that the *more* it is the will of *all*, the *less* is it *law*; so that it ceases to be *law* if it is, without exception, the work of *all* those who must obey it.

Just as pure democracy does not exist, neither does a purely voluntary state of association. One starts from this theoretical power only for the sake of understanding; and it is in this sense that one can affirm that sovereignty is born at the moment it begins not to be *the whole people*, that it strengthens itself to the degree that it becomes less *the whole people*.

This spirit of voluntary association is the constitutive principle of republics; of necessity it has a primitive germ: it is *divine*, and no one can produce it. Mixed in more or less with sovereignty, the common base of all governments, its *greater* or *lesser* presence forms the different *physiognomies* of non-monarchical governments.

The observer, and particularly the foreign observer who lives in a republican country, can distinguish the effects of these two principles very well. Sometimes he senses sovereignty, and sometimes the community spirit that serves to supplement it; public power acts less and above all shows itself less than in monarchies. One could say that it distrusts itself. A certain family spirit, which is easier to feel than describe, dispenses sovereignty from acting in a host of circumstances where it would intervene elsewhere. Thousands of small things go one by themselves, and as the common phrase has it, *without knowing how*. Order and agreement are apparent everywhere; communal property is respected even by the poor, and everything, even the general propriety, gives the observer food for thought.

A republican people being, therefore, a people less governed than any other, we can see that the activity of sovereignty must be supplemented by public spirit, so that the less a people has wisdom to perceive what is good, and the virtue to hold themselves to it, the less they are suited for a republic.

One sees at a glance the advantages and disadvantages of this form of government. In its best days, it eclipses all others, and the marvels it produces seduce even the most composed and judicious observers. But, first, it is suitable only for very small nations, because the formation and maintenance of the spirit of association becomes more difficult in direct proportion to the number of associates, which needs not be proved.

Second, justice here does not have that calm and undisturbed action that we commonly see in monarchies. In democracies, justice is sometimes weak and sometimes impassioned; it is said than in these governments no one can brave the power of the law. This means that punishment of a famous guilty or accused person being a veritable entertainment for the *common people*, which in this way console themselves for the inevitable superiority of the aristocracy, public opinion powerfully favours these sorts of judgements; but if the guilty person is obscure, or in general if the crime wounds neither the pride nor the immediate interest of the majority of individual people, this same opinion resists the action of justice and paralyses it.

In a monarchy, the nobility, being only an extension of royal authority, participates to a certain degree in the inviolability of the monarch, and this immunity (always infinitely below that which belongs to the sovereign) is graduated in a such a way that it belongs to fewer people as it grows in extent.[6]

In a monarchy, immunity, differentially graduated, is for the few; in a democracy it is for the larger number.

In the first case, it scandalizes the common people; in the second case, it makes them happy. I believe this is good in both cases; that is to say I believe it a necessary element of each government, which amounts to the same thing, for whatever constitutes a government is always good, at least in an absolute sense.

However when we compare governments to governments, it is something else. It is then a question of putting into the scale the advantages and liabilities for the human species that result from these different social forms.

From this point of view, I believe monarchy superior to democracy in the administration of justice, and I speak not only of criminal justice, but of civil justice as well. We notice in the second the same weakness as in the first.

[6] These infinite nuances, these admirable combinations so far above all human calculations, are made to lead us constantly to the contemplation of the hidden power that has put *number*, weight, and *measure* everywhere. In the physical world we are undoubtedly surrounded by marvels, but the sources of action are blind and the laws inflexible. In the moral or political world, admiration is exalted to rapture when one reflects that the laws of this order, no less sure than physical laws, have at the same time a flexibility that permits them to be combined with the action of the free agents that operate in this order of things. It is a watch, all of whose pieces vary continually in their forms and dimensions, and that always keeps perfect time. [Maistre reproduces the same analogy in the first chapter of his *Considerations on France* (CUP ed.), 24.]

The magistrate is not sufficiently superior to the citizen; he has the air of being an arbitrator rather than a judge; and forced to use discretion even when he speaks in the name of the law, we see that he does not believe in his own power. His strength comes only from the adhesion of his equals, because there is no sovereign, or the sovereign is insufficiently so.

From this it follows in particular that monarchy is the only government where foreigners have equal status with citizens in the courts. In republics, nothing equals the iniquity, or, if you will, the impotence of the courts when it is a question of deciding between a foreigner and a citizen. The more democratic a republic is, the more striking this impotence. What neighbour to one of these states has not said a thousand times: "*It is impossible to obtain justice against those people!*" This is because the less sovereignty is separated from the people, the less it exists, if we may put it this way; it is because the associates accept it well enough when justice is done between them, at least insofar as the interest of each individual rigorously requires it; but they refuse it with impunity to the foreigner, who cannot request it from a sovereign that does not exist, or that does not exist in its entirety.

What deceives a great number of superficial observers is that they often mistake *police* for *justice*. One must not be duped by a certain regulatory pedantry that the people are passionately fond of because it serves to provoke the rich. In a city where one is punished for having trotted a horse, one can kill a man with impunity, provided the assassin be born in a shop.

"Cromwell," Rousseau says, "would have been condemned to hard labor by the people of Berne, and the Duke de Beaufort sentenced to the reformatory by the Genevans."[7]

Rousseau is mistaken on two counts: if a Cromwell had been born in Berne, he would have been put in irons, not by the *people*, but by *their Excellencies the Sovereign Lords of the Canton*, which is not quite synonymous.

As for Geneva, a handful of men who are not *Dukes of Beaufort*,[8] but vile rascals, the shame and the scum of the human species, have there put *to the discipline*, literally, honest people whom they have not slaughtered; and the proof that the bunglers and the *market-hall kings*

[7] *Contrat social*, Bk. IV, chap. 1. [*CW*, 4:198.]

[8] [François de Bourbon (1616–1669), Duke de Beaufort, was a famous conspirator during the Fronde, and was nicknamed the *King of the Market-halls*. He made his submission to Louis XIV in 1653. (Darcel ed.)]

have never been able to be repressed there as easily as Rousseau assumes, is that he, Rousseau, was never put *to the discipline*, and that he was able to exist in Geneva, always safe and sound, though a detestable citizen who corrupted his country with impunity.

In general, justice is always weak in a democracy when it acts alone, and always cruel and thoughtless when it relies on the people.

Some political writers have claimed that one of the good aspects of republican government is the wisdom the people possess in confiding the exercise of its authority only to worthy people. No one, they say, chooses better than the people; when it is a question of their own interests, nothing can seduce them, and merit alone decides them.

I do not know if there is not much illusion in this idea; democracy could not exist for a moment if it were not tempered by aristocracy, and especially by hereditary aristocracy, which is perhaps more indispensable in this form of government than in a monarchy. The simple right to vote in a republic gives neither prestige nor power. When Rousseau tells us, in the introductory note to his *Social Contract*, that, in his capacity as a citizen of a free state, he is himself *sovereign*, even the most benevolent reader feels a laugh coming on. You count for something in a republic only in proportion as birth, alliances, and great talent give you influence; the simple citizen really counts for nothing. In Athens, the men of this class counted for so little that they refused to be found in the Assembly; those who dispensed themselves had to be threatened with punishement. Finally they had to be given a wage, or, better said, an *alms* of three obols, to get them to come to make up the number of citizens prescribed by the law, which greatly amused the *Pentakosiomedimnoi*.[9] The comedies of Arisophanes often joke about these sovereigns at so much a session, and nothing is better known in history than the *Tribolon dicasticon*.[10]

The masses of the people therefore have very little influence on elections, as on other affairs. It is the aristocracy who chooses, and, as we know, they choose very well. When the crowd is involved in affairs, it is by a kind of insurrection, sometimes necessary to halt the too rapid action of the aristocracy, but always very dangerous and producing the most terrible effects. "Yet the difficulties sometimes

[9] "Wishing to leave all the magistracies in the hands of the well-to-do, Solon made an appraisement of the property of the citizens. Those who enjoyed a yearly increase of *five hundred measures*, he placed in the first class, and called them *Pentakosiomedimnoi*." Plutarch, *Lives, Solon* 18.1.

[10] ["Three-obol juryman's pay." The daily pay for male citizens acting as judges; Athenian cases had juries of 300 or 500 "dicests."]

caused by the multitude," Rousseau says, "can be judged by what happened in the time of the Gracchi, when part of the Citizenry voted from the rooftops."[11] He ought also to have noticed that when they voted on the housetops they also slaughtered in the streets, and that at the time of the Gracchi the Roman Republic no longer existed. In quiet times, the people allows itself to be lead by its leaders; it is then that it is wise, because it does little; it is then that it chooses very well, because the choice is made for it. Then it contents itself with the power that it holds from the Constitution, and when, without daring, as it were, to put it to use, it relies on the knowledge and wisdom of the aristocracy. When, on the other side, the leaders, sufficiently restrained by the fear of seeing themselves deprived of the exercise of power, use it with a wisdom that justifies this confidence, this is when republics shine. But when respect is lost on the one side, and fear on the other, the State marches rapidly towards ruin...

Rousseau, in weighing the advantages of monarchical and republican government, does not fail to seize and exaggerate in his way the superiority of the second with respect to the choice of people who occupy offices.

"An essential and inevitable defect," he says, "which will always place monarchical government below republican, is that in the latter the public voice almost never raises to high positions any but enlightened, capable men, who fulfill them with honor; whereas those who attain them in monarchies are most often merely petty troublemakers, petty rascals, petty intriguers, whose petty talents – which lead to high postions in royal Courts – serve only to reveal their ineptitude to the public as soon as thse men are in place."[12]

I do not doubt that in a republic one does not put in the stocks an apprentice watchmaker who would come out of his *stall* to entertain the top men of the state, these *petty troublemakers*, these *petty intriguers*, these *petty rascals*, etc. But in a monarchy people are less susceptible; they amuse themselves with a similar species as with a clown or a monkey; they can even allow him to print his books in the capital, but that is pushing indulgence too far.[13]

[11] *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. xv. [*CW*, 4:193.]

[12] Ibid., chap. vi. [*CW*, 4:178.]

[13] The French government greatly injured itself by closing its eyes too long to similar excesses; this is what cost the unfortunate Louis XVI his life and his throne. "Books have done everything," Voltaire said. Undoubtedly, because they let all kinds of books be produced.

However, let us see what there can be that is true in this diatribe; for if the gist of it were true, the form would be less reprehensible.

The most ancient of secular historians showed himself more loyal than Rousseau with respect to a monarchy that he probably did not like. "For good service among the Persians is much honoured," he said, "and rewarded by high preferment."[14]

We see that even at the court of the *Great King*, petty knaves did not exclude men of merit; but, to generalize the thesis, I would first like to have explained to me by what magic these prodigious gatherings of talents that have illustrated different centuries have always shown their brilliance under the influence of a single man.

Alexander, Augustus, Leo X, the Medici, Francis I, Louis XIV, and Queen Ann, sought out, employed, and rewarded more great men of all kinds than all the republics in the world together. It is always one man who has given his name to his century, and it is only by the choice of men that he was able to merit this honour.

What spectacle is comparable to that of the age of Louis XIV? Absolute sovereign and almost adored, no one restrained him in his distribution of favours; and what man chose men better? Colbert ruled his finances; the terrible talents of Louvois presided over war; Turenne, Condé, Catinat, Luxembourg, Berwick, Créqui, Vendôme, and Villars led his land armies; Vauban fortified France; Dugay-Trouin, Tourville, Jean Bart, Duquesne, Forbin d'Oppède, d'Estrées, and Renaud commanded his fleets; Talon, Lamoignon, and d'Aguesseau sat in his courts; Bourdaloue and Massillon preached before him; the episcopate received from his hand this same Massillon, Fléchier, Bossuet, and the great Fénelon, the honour of France, the honour of his age, and the honour of humanity. In his *royal* academies the talents gathered under his protection shone with a unique brilliance; it is he who made France the true fatherland of talents of all kinds, the arbiter of fame, and the distributor of glory.

Perhaps one could say that chance having placed under his hand a crowd of great men, he did not have even the merit of choice. So then? Is one to think that his century lacked mediocre men, who thinking themselves suitable for everything, asked for everything? This kind swarms everywhere at all times. Moreover, it is precisely here that I would confront the extreme admirers of republican government. This form of government, as we can never repeat enough, is not lasting. It

[14] Herodotus 3.154. Elsewhere he also says: "the Persians are of all men known to me the most wont to honour valiant warriers." (Ibid., 7.238.) [Translations, A.D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library 1957.]

only exists, it only shines, by a rare coming together of great talents and great virtues, and this union is necessarily concentrated on a small enough number of heads. What does one say, in effect, when one says that the *people* chooses its agents perfectly? One says that one wise man chooses another: this is the whole miracle.

Rousseau lived in Paris under the deplorable reign of Louis XV; that is to say, he witnessed the agony of France. On the basis of some positions distributed by Madame de Pompadour, he hurried to write that, *in monarchies*, we only see *petty troublemakers, petty rascals,* and *petty intriguers* achieving high offices. We must not be astonished; this man never saw more than one point.

I do not want to deny that monarchical government is more exposed than any other to being deceived in its choice of persons; but the eternal declamations on the errors of blind patronage are less well founded than is commonly imagined. First, if you listen to pride, kings always choose badly, for there is no malcontent who does not without question prefer himself to the lucky one chosen. Moreover, too often princes are accused when it is the people who should be accused. In times of universal degradation, people complain that merit does not succeed; but where, then, is this forgotten merit? They are bound to point it out before they accuse the government. Under the last two reigns in France, we certainly saw very mediocre men invested with important offices; but to which men of merit were they preferred? Today, now that a revolution, perhaps the most complete there has ever been, has broken all the chains that could have held talent captive, where are they? You will find them perhaps, but joined to profound immorality. As for talents of this kind, the very spirit that preserves empires is what keeps them away from high office. In addition, as a sacred writer put it very well, "*there is a wisdom that abounds in evil.*"[15] It is this talent that has devastated France for five years. Among even the most remarkable men who have appeared on this stage bathed in blood and tears, if we look carefully, we will find no or very little real political talent. They have been very good at doing evil; this is the only eulogy that they can be given. Happily the most famous of them have written, and when all passions are asleep in the grave, posterity will read in these indiscreetly traced pages that the most monstrous errors dominated these proud men, and that the previous government, which repressed them, kept them in chains, and punished them was, without knowing it, fighting for its own preservation.

[15] Ecclesiasticus 21:15.

It is because France was degenerating, it is because talents were lacking there, that the kings too often seemed to have welcomed the mediocrity presented by intrigue. This is a very gross error, into which we nevertheless fall daily without our noticing it. Although we recognize the hidden hand that directs everything, such is however the illusion that results from the activity of secondary causes, that we commonly reason as if this hand did not exist. When we contemplate the play of intrigue around thrones, words like *accident, fortune, misfortune,* and *chance* naturally present themselves, and we say them a little too quickly, without perceiving that they make no sense.

Undoubtedly man is free; man can make mistakes, but not enough to disturb the general plans. We are all attached to the throne of the Eternal by a supple chain that reconciles the *self-propulsion* of free agents with divine supremacy.[16] Without contradiction, a given king can for a time keep a real talent from the place it was destined for, and this unhappy faculty can be extended more or less; but, in general, there is a secret force that carries each *individual* to his place. Otherwise the state could not subsist. We recognize in a plant an unknown power, a form-giving force, essentially *one*, that creates and conserves, that always moves towards its goal, that appropriates what serves it, that rejects what hurts it, that carries to the last fibril of the last leaf the sap that it needs, and that fights with all its strength the diseases of the vegetable body. This force is still more visible and more admirable in the animal world! How blind we are! How could we believe that the political body does not also have its law, its soul, its form-giving force, and believe that everything is left to the whims of human ignorance? If the moral mechanisms of empires were made manifest to our eyes, we would be freed from a crowd of errors. We would see, for example, that a given man, who appears to us to have been made for a particular office, is a *disease* that the vital force pushes to the surface, while we deplore the *misfortune* that prevents him from insinuating himself in the sources of life. These words *talent* and *genius* deceive us every day; often these qualities are absent where we think we see them, and often as well they belong to dangerous men.

As for those terrible times when empires must perish, they depart visibly from the ordinary course of events. Then all the ordinary rules are suspended, the mistakes of the government that is going to break up prove nothing against this form of government. They are simply the

[16] [See the opening sentence of Maistre's *Considerations on France*, where he writes "We are all attached to the throne of the Supreme Being by a supple chain that restrains us without enslaving us." (CUP ed.), 23.]

symptoms of death, and nothing more; everything must perish to make way for new creations:

> And nothing, so that all can last,
> Lasts eternally.[17]

One must submit; but in the ordinary course of things, I invite the subjects of monarchies to look into their conscience and to ask themselves if they know many real talents, many pure talents, unrecognized or repressed by the sovereign. If they want to listen to the response of their conscience, they will learn to content themselves with the blessings that they possess, instead of envying the imaginary perfections of other governments.

To hear these defenders of democracy speak, one would think that the people deliberate like a senate of sages, while in fact judicial murders, hazardous undertakings, extravagant choices, and above all foolish and disastrous wars are eminently the accompaniment of this form of government.

But who has ever said worse of democracy than Rousseau, who flatly decided that it is only made for a people of gods?[18] It remains to be seen how a government that is made only *for gods*, is nevertheless proposed *to men* as the only legitimate form of government; for if this is not the sense of the social contract, the social contract makes no sense at all.[19]

However this is not all. "Besides," he says, "consider how many things that are hard to combine are presupposed by this form Government. First, a very small State where the people is easily assembled and where each citizen can easily know all the others. Second, great simplicity of morals, which prevents a multitude of business and knotty discussions. Next, a great equality of ranks and of fortunes, without

[17] Malherbe, [*Ode au roi Henri le Grand sur la prise de Marseille*, v. 39–40].

[18] *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. iv. [*CW*, 4:174.]

[19] It might be said that Rousseau expressly recognizes other forms of government as legitimate; but we must not be duped by words. He himself has taken the pains to lay out his profession of faith for us: "Every legitimate Government," he says, "is republican." (Bk. II, chap. vi) And to avoid all equivocation, here is his note: "By this word I do not mean only an Aristocracy or a Democracy, but in general any government guided by the general will, which is the law. In order to be legitimate, the Government must not be confounded with the Sovereign, but must be its minister. Then monarchy itself is a republic." (Ibid.) [*CW*, 4:153.] So everywhere where the law is not the expression of the will of *all* the *people*, government is not legitimate. We must remember this.

which equality of rights and authority could not subsist for long. Finally, little or no luxury."[20]

For the moment I will consider only the first of these conditions. If democracy suits only very small States, how can this form of government be proposed as the only legitimate form of government, and, if it may be put this way, as a *formula* able to resolve all political questions?

Rousseau is not at all embarrassed by this difficulty. "It is no use," he says, "objecting the abuses of a large State to someone who wants only small ones." Which is to say: "I, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, declare solemnly, so that no one may be ignorant of this, that I DO NOT WANT a large empire. If there have been in the world, Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Arabs, Tartars, etc., all these nations were abuses, which existed only because I was not there. *I do not want* these peoples *so difficult to assemble*. In vain does unity of language demonstrate the unity of these great families; in vain does the disposition of sea coasts, rivers, and mountains form vast basins obviously destined to contain these nations, in vain does the experience of all past centuries demonstrate the intention of the Creator. I am embarrassed neither by metaphysics, nor geography, nor history. *I do not want large States*. I extend my philosophic ruler over the surface of the globe; I divide it like a chess-board, and, in the middle of each square of 2,000 measures per side, I build a beautiful city of Geneva, which for more surety I will fill with *gods*."

This tone is allowed, undoubtedly, when one is up against errors so far beneath serious refutation. Moreover, I do not know why Rousseau was willing to admit that democratic government involves some small abuses. He had found a very simple means of justifying it: this is to judge it only by its theoretical perfections, and to regard the evils that it produces as small anomalies without consequences, which do not deserve the scrutiny of the observer.

"The general will," he says, "is always right and always tends toward the public utility. But it does not follow that the people's deliberations always have the same rectitude. ... The people is never corrupted, but it is often fooled, and only then does it appear to want what is bad."[21] Drink, Socrates, drink! And console yourself with these distinctions: the good people of Athens only *appear* to will what is evil.

[20] Ibid., Bk. III, chap. iv. [*CW*, 4:173–4.]

[21] Ibid., Bk. II, chap. iii. [*CW*, 4:147.]

Such is the spirit of party: it does not want to see, or only wants to see one side. This ridiculousness shows itself in an especially striking manner in the excessive eulogies that Rousseau and his disciples made to democracy and especially to antique democracy. I recall having read, in one of these panegyrics, that "the superiority of popular government over that of government by one is decided simply by the superiority of interest inspired by the history of republics, compared to that of monarchies." It is always the same illusion. Democracy only being able to subsist by the force of virtues, energy and public spirit, if a nation has received from the Creator a capacity for this form of government, it is certain that in its times of vigour, it must, by the very nature of things, give birth to a dazzling group of great men whose high achievements give to its history a charm and inexpressible interest.

There is moreover in popular governments more activity, and more movement, and movement is the life of history. Unhappily, the happiness of peoples is in peace, and almost always the pleasure of the reader is founded on their suffering.

Let us repeat it, because nothing is more true; nothing equals the great days of republics; but this is a flash. Moreover, in admiring the beautiful effects of this government, it is also necessary to take into account the crimes and follies that it has brought forth, even in happy times, for the influence of the wise does not always suffice, by a great deal, to contain there the disordered activity of the people.

Is it not better to be Miltiades than the favourite of the greatest monarch in the world? Yes, without doubt, on the day of the battle of Marathon. But, a year after, on the day when this great man is thrown into prison to finish his days there, the question becomes doubtful.

Aristides and Cimon were banished; Themistocles and Timotheus died in exile; Socrates and Phocion drank the hemlock. Athens did not spare one of its great men.

I do not deny that the Athenians were admirable in certain respects; but I also believe, with an author of antiquiy, that they have been too much admired.[22] When I read the history of these "lightweight people, suspicious, violent, hateful, jealous of power,"[23] and almost

[22] "The acts of the Athenians were indeed great and glorious enough, but nevertheless somewhat less important than fame represents them." (Sallust *The War with Catiline* 8.) [Loeb.] For example, in admiring the heros of Plataea, Thermopylae, and Salamis, it is permitted to recall Caesar's exclamation on the field of battle where he had just wiped out and made sport of the hordes of Asia: "Happy Pompey! What enemies you had to fight!"

[23] Cornelius Nepos *In Timoth* 3.

never knowing how to help themselves, I lean very much towards Voltaire's sentiment, which called Athenian democracy, *the government of the mob*.[24]

Condorcet was no less the enemy of this government and of all those that resemble it. He complained of the "pedant Mably who always looked for his examples in the despotic anarchies of Greece."[25]

And truly, it is a great error to reason too much in politics from the examples left to us by antiquity. It is in vain that they would want to make Athenians, Lacedaemonians or Romans of us. Perhaps we must say: "*Nos sumus argillæ deterioris opus*."[26] At least if they were not better, they were different. *Man is always the same*, it is often said. This is easily said; but the thoughtful politician does not decide by these beautiful axioms, which he knows are nothing, when he comes to the examination of particular cases. Mably said somewhere: "*It is Livy who taught me all I know in politics*." This certainly gives too much honour to Livy; but I am more sorry for Mably.

[24] "When I supplicated you to be the restorer of the beaux-arts of Greece, my prayer did not go as far as swearing you to reestablish Athenian democracy: *I do not like government by the mob*. You would have given the government of Greece to M. de Lentulus, or some other general who would have prevented the new Greeks from committing as much foolishness as their ancestors." (Voltaire to the King of Prussia, 23 October 1773. *Oeuvres de Voltaire*, 86:51.)

To say it in passing, I do not know why they so obstinately make this man one of the saints of the French Revolution, of which he would have liked only its irreligious side. He made it in large part, but he would have abhorred it. There never existed any man, I do not say only more proud, but more vain and more the enemy of any kind of equality.

[25] Condorcet, *Vie de Voltaire* (Paris 1791), p. 299. Since Mably is also one of the oracles of our time, it is good to have him judged *by his peers*.

[26] [We are the product of inferior clay.]

CHAPTER FIVE

Of the Best Kind of Sovereignty

"Therefore when one asks which is absolutely the best Government, one poses a question that is insoluble because it is indeterminate. Or, if you prefer, it has as many correct answers as there are possible combinations of the absolute and relative situations of peoples."[1]

Rousseau's observation admits of no reply. He consecrated half of his book to refuting the other; but, in truth, he took too much trouble, these few lines sufficed.

He saw very well that it is never necessary to ask what is the best government in general, since there is none that is suited to all nations. Each nation has its own, just as each has its language and its character, and this government is the best for it. From which it obviously follows that the whole theory of social contract is a schoolboy's dream.

It can never be repeated often enough: "There are as many good governments as there are possible combinations in the absolute and relative positions of peoples." And since none of these combinations depend on men, it follows that the consent of peoples counts for nothing in the formation of governments.

"But if one asks by what sign it is possible to know whether a given people is well or badly governed, this is something else again, and the question of fact could be resolved."[2] One could not state it any better: the question is never to know what is the best form of government, but which is the nation best governed following the principles of its government?

It is precisely this question, the only reasonable question, that Rousseau treated with his usual levity.

[1] [Rousseau], *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. ix. [*CW*, 4:185.]

[2] Ibid.

"What is," he asks, "the end of the political association? – It is the preservation and prosperity of its members." So far, so good. "And what," he continues, "is the surest sign that they – the members of body politic – are preserved and prosperous? It is their number and their population. ... the Government under which ... the Citizens increase and multiply most, is infallibly the best. One under which a people grows smaller and dwindles away is the worst. Calculators, it is up to you now. Count, measure, compare."[3]

There is nothing more superficial, nothing more dubious, nothing more badly reasoned than this entire piece.

Rousseau has just said that one must not ask: "What is the best government" and that this question is as *insoluble* as *indeterminate*. And now, in the same chapter, what he tells us is that the *best government* is the one that *peoples* the most, and that the *worst* is that under which a people *diminishes* and *decays*; there is therefore a *good* and a *bad* government absolutely. Try, if your can, to make Rousseau agree with himself.

Can it be said that in the second part of his chapter he does not compare one nation with another, but one nation to itself, considering it in different periods?

In this supposition, Rousseau wants to say that when a people multiplies, this is a sign that it is *well* governed, and that if this people *decays*, this is a sign that it is *badly* governed; which is to say that in the first case one *follows* and that in the second one *violates* the principles of the government that is the best for this specific nation. Well done! In this case, however, it must be admitted that the statement of so trivial a truth is a rare ridiculous thing; and this ridiculousness becomes really unspeakable when we recall that this wonderful discovery is preceded by a haughty reproach addressed to all the publicists who have not wanted to acknowledge this infallible rule for judging governments.[4]

In a word, if Rousseau wants to say that there are governments essentially *bad* that kill men, and others essentially *good* that multiply them, he says an absurdity, and he also contradicts himself, obviously. If he means that a given nation is badly governed when it decays or that it languishes to the degree that its population declines, and that, on the contrary, it is well governed when its population increases or it

[3] Ibid. [*CW*, 4:185.]

[4] "As for me, I am astounded that one very simple sign is overlooked or not agreed upon out of bad faith. ... Therefore, don't seek this much disputed sign elsewhere." Ibid. [*CW*, 4:185.]

sustains itself to the highest degree, he talks nonsense. The choice is yours.

We can conclude, in any case, from what Rousseau advances about population that he was as profound in political economy as in metaphysics, history, or morality.

Population is not the unique thermometer of the prosperity of states; it must be combined with the well-being and richness of the people. The population must be *rich* and *available*. A nation whose population had increased to the highest degree possible, and of which each individual in consequence possessed only the necessary minimum, would be a weak and unfortunate nation; the least political upset would overwhelm it with calamities. One nation of twenty million men can be not only more happy, which does not require proof, but more powerful than another nation of twenty million. This is what the economists have proved perfectly, and Mr. Young has just confirmed it by new observations, in a work equally precious by the truths he establishes and by the errors he retracts.[5]

[5] *Voyage agronomique de France.* [Probably a reference to Arthur Young's *Travels in France during the Years 1787, 1788 and 1789* (Bury St. Edmund's 1792), which was translated into French under the title *Voyages en France, pendant les années 1787, 88, 89 et 90, entrepris plus particulièrement pour s'assurer de l'état de l'agriculture, des richesses, des resources et de la prospérité de cette nation* (Paris: Buisson 1793–anII). In his draft "Cinquième lettre d'un Royaliste Savoisien," Maistre cited another essay by the English economist, translated under the title *L'exemple de la France, avis aux Anglois et aux autre nations* (Bruxelles 1793), which he saw as "a protestation of common sense against the visions of theory." See *REM*, no. 4 (1978): 42. (Darcel ed.)]

CHAPTER SIX

Continuation of the Same Subject

The best government for each nation is that one which, in the area of land occupied by that nation, is capable of procuring the greatest possible sum of happiness and power, to the greatest possible number of men, during the longest possible time. I dare to believe that no one can deny the justice of this definition; and it is in following it that comparison of nations in relation to their governments becomes possible. In effect, although we cannot ask absolutely: *What is the best form of government?* nothing prevents us from asking: *which nation is relatively the most numerous, the most powerful, the most happy, over the longest period, through the influence of the government suitable to it?*

How peculiar that in the study of politics we do not want to use the same method of reasoning and same general analogies that guide us in study of other sciences. In physical research, every time that it is a question of estimating a variable force, we take the average quantity. In astronomy, in particular, we always speak of *average distance* and of *average time.* To judge the merit of a government, we must use the same method.

Any government is a variable force, which produces effects as variable as itself, within certain limits. To judge it, it must not be examined at a single moment. It must be surveyed over the whole period of its existence. Thus, to judge the French monarchy rationally, we must sum up all the virtues and vices of all the kings of France and divide by 66; the result is an *average king*; and the same must be said of other monarchies.

Democracy has one brilliant moment, but it is one moment, and it is necessary to pay dearly for it. The great days of Athens could, I agree, inspire desires in the subject of a monarchy languishing in such and such a period under the sceptre of an inept or wicked king. Nevertheless, we would be prodigiously mistaken if we claimed to

establish the superiority of democracy over monarchy by comparing these two instances, because in this judgement, we neglect among other factors the consideration of duration, which is a necessary element in these sorts of appraisals.[1]

In general, all democratic governments are only transient meteors, whose brilliance excludes duration.

Aristocratic republics have more consistency because they approach monarchy, and the mass of the people plays no role in them. Sparta was an admirable phenomenon in this genre. However, with unique institutions, only within reach of an extraordinary people, with a certain kingship, with a strong and imposing aristocracy, with a very restricted territory, with the harshest slavery admitted as an element of government, Sparta's government lasted only about half the time as the duration of the realm of France up to our time.

Still, before quitting the ancients, let us examine the most famous government in the world, that of Rome.

Let us count, in round numbers, 700 years from the foundation of Rome to the Battle of Actium: seven kings occupied the first 244 years of this period, leaving 456 years for the republic. However the republic's old age was frightful: what man would be bold enough to characterize as free the government that saw the Gracchi, the triumvirs, and the proscriptions. Ferguson, in his Roman history, observes, with reason, that the century of the Gracchi alone produced more horrors than the history of any other nation in the world in a similar period.[2] (He had not seen the French Revolution!)

The sedition of the Gracchi is dated 621 years from the foundation of Rome, leaving therefore 377 years for the government that could call itself *Republic*; this is an instant, and nevertheless it is far from clear that this government was a democracy. The first merit of a political constitution consists in the extent of its possible duration; so it is bad reasoning to judge it by its effects in a particular period. When a simple or even common mechanism produces four inches of

[1] [In Maistre's manuscript, following this paragraph, four and a half pages are struck out. In the margin, in handwriting other than that of Joseph de Maistre, is the notation: "In general all democratic governments." In the omitted pages, Maistre compares the history of Athens, of Sparta, and of Rome with that of European monarchical states, notabably France. Several of the deleted passages are utilized later in the text. (Darcel ed.)]

[2] [Adam Ferguson, *Histoire des progrès et de la chute de la République romaine*, translated from English (Paris: Nyon l'aîné 1784–91, 7 vols). The original English edition was *The History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Empire* (London: W. Strahan 1783). (Darcel ed.)]

water for the irrigation of a field or for any other interesting purpose, when the most skilful mechanic comes to propose another machine that will furnish double, this man must not be listened to at once, for if the new machine is fragile, if the maintenance is costly, if it costs ten times more and lasts ten times less than the other, the father of the family must reject it.

On this principle, which it is impossible to contest, if one were asked, for example, what one must think of the English constitution, which is however what appears to be and what can be imagined the most perfect, at least for a great people, the true political thinker can only reply as follows. This constitution, as it exists since it received its last form, dates only from the year 1688. Therefore it has only a century of duration in its favour, that is to say, a moment. But who can answer for the future? Not only do we have no moral certitude in this regard, but there are strong reasons to fear that this beautiful creation is not durable. "Every nation or city," says Tacitus, "is governed by the people, or by the nobility, or by individuals: a constitution selected and blended from these types is easier to commend than to create; or, if created, its tenure of life is brief."[3]

Here is the English constitution condemned in advance in express terms, and by an excellent judge.

If we consult even enlightened Englishmen, how many alarming responses will we not receive! A certain writer of this nation, who is profoundly instructed in the finances of his country and who has written the history of this subject, a writer in no way suspect since he shows himself attached to the government in every way and who wrote expressly to calm minds and to strengthen them against the system of an inevitable bankruptcy, this man, I say, nevertheless decided unequivocally that "Frugality, integrity, and propriety are not therefore to be expected in the expenditure of public money, till a political revolution shall take place in the administration of the country."[4]

More recently still, in a trial famous on more than one count, England heard one of the first magistrates of the crown, the solicitor general, say publicly to the nation and to Europe that "he would not disguise but that there were abuses in our government; nay, he would suppose, abominable abuses; and if the season were proper, he would

[3] Tactitus *Annals* 4.33. [Loeb.]

[4] *The History of Public Revenue of the British Empire*, by Sir John Sinclair [London: T. Cadell 1790], Part III.

himself bring forward some such propositions intended to correct them."[5]

Finally, to confine ourselves to the present time, could the first minister of this great and illustrious nation prevent himself from complaining, in the open House, of members of the opposition who tire the administration in "the difficulty and embarrassment of a particular crisis ... a moment of embarrassment, irritation and disquietude"?[6]

The perfect formation, the completion, the consolidation of the English constitution such as it exists in our days, cost the English torrents of blood; they will not have paid too much if it lasts. But if ever (*et omen quidem dii prohibeant!*[7]), if ever this beautiful constitution must come apart, if this dissolution is delayed only a century or two, and if the destruction of this superb machine has to be accompanied by all the discord that preceded the expulsion of the Stuarts, it would be proved that this constitution, so vaunted, so worthy of being praised in its great days, was nevertheless bad, because it was not durable.

Happily, it is permitted to suppose the contrary, because liberty is not new among the English, as I observed above; so that the state in which they find themselves today is not a forced state, and also because the balance of the three powers seems to promise to this government, at least for a long time, the power to recover its health. But it must also be noted that we have no certainty in this regard. The one incontestable point is that the English constitution cannot be judged definitively, because it has not undergone the test of time, and if a Frenchman, in agreeing to the superiority of this constitution considered in an absolute way, nevertheless maintained that the government of his own country was a better average government than that of England, the legitimate judges of this assertion are not yet born.

The consideration of the duration of governments leads us naturally to that of the greatest happiness of nations. In effect, as all political revolutions necessarily lead to great evils, the greatest interest of

[5] Discourse of the solicitor general in the trial of Thomas Hardy and others, accused of high treason, 4 November 1794. *London Chronicle*, no. 5973, p. 447.

One will give the weight one wishes to the hypothetical expression *he would suppose*; for the rest, to say it in passing, this great trial made distinterested jurisconsults fear that England had proved, on this occasion, that it lacked *law* or *justice*. But it would be better to suspend judgement and to believe that one would think otherwise if one saw things close up.

[6] Mr. Pitt's discourse in reponse to that of Mr. Fox, in the House of Commons, session of 24 March 1795. *Morning Chronicle*, no. 7939.

[7] ["May Heaven indeed avert this omen." Tacitus *Annals* 16.35. Loeb.]

peoples is the stability of governments. But it does not suffice to examine these particular cases; again it is necessary to put into the scales the benefits and the evils that result, for the greatest number of men, from different forms of sovereignty, throughout their duration.

In reasoning on diverse kinds of government, we do not lay enough stress on considerations drawn from the general happiness, which, however, should be our only guide. We must have the courage to admit to ourselves an incontestable truth that would cool our enthusiasm for free constitutions a little; this is that, in every republic over a certain size, what is called *liberty* is only the absolute sacrifice of a great number of men to the independence and pride of a small number. This is what is especially important not to lose sight of when it is a question of judging the republics of antiquity, of which a great number or writers, namely Rousseau and Mably, have shown themselves infinitely too infatuated.

Strictly speaking, all governments are monarchies that differ only in whether the monarch is for life or for a term, hereditary or elective, individual or corporate; or, if you will, for it is the same idea in other words, all government is aristocratic, composed of more or fewer ruling heads, from democracy, in which this aristocracy is composed of as many heads as the nature of things permits, to monarchy, in which the aristocracy, inevitable in every government, is dominated by a single head topping the pyramid, and which undoubtedly forms the government most natural to man.

But of all monarchs, the harshest, most despotic, and most intolerable, is the monarch *people*. Again history testifies to this great truth, that the liberty of the minority is founded only on the slavery of the multitude, and that republics have never been anything but multi-headed sovereigns, whose despotism, always harsher and more capricious than that of monarchs, increased in intensity as the number of subjects multiplied.

Rome, above all, to reign over its vast domains, exercised this despotism in all its fullness, and no power was ever more absolute. All the power of the government, concentrated on the Capitol, presented to a trembling world only a single head, that unique power before which all had to bow. While in modern times no capital of a vast state has been able to give it its name, Rome, on the contrary, *immensi caput orbis*,[8] impressed its name on all that depended on it, and did not permit even language to alter the exclusive idea of this power; thus the

[8] ["the capital of the boundless world." Ovid *Metamorphoses* 15.435. Loeb.]

empire was not *Italian* but *Roman*. The army was *Roman*. There was in the provinces no counterweight, no force of resistance; Rome directed everything, moved everything, struck everywhere. The name of Rome was King, and the prostrate imagination of peoples saw only this astonishing city.

Quanta nec est nec erit nec visa prioribus annis.[9]

But who could prevent themselves from groaning at the human condition when they reflect that this enormous power was the patrimony of a handful of men, and that Rome with its 1,200,000 inhabitants[10] counted scarcely 2,000 proprietors within its walls?[11]

It is to this small number of men that the known world was sacrificed. Some readers would perhaps be pleased to see how French liberty has justly appreciated antique liberty.[12] It is to satisfy them

[9] ["Than which none greater is or shall be, or has been in past ages." Ibid. 15.44. Loeb.]

[10] People have written foolishly about the population of ancient Rome; some exaggerators have given the number as 4, as 8, and even as 14 million. Brottier justly called these calculations: *enormous and absurd calculations* (*de urbis Romae Pomoerio et magnitudine, incolarumque numero; Notae et Emend. in Tac.* 2:375). This able commentator gives the population as 1,200,000. Gibbon arrived at the same result by other means (*History of the Rise and Fall*, Vol. 1). Byres, by a calculation based on the size of the great circus, claimed that the population of the city and its suburbs could not have been more than three million. Moore claimed that if the wall of Belisarius had really served as a limit for the ancient city, it could not have contained at any time more than 500,000 or 600,000 souls, unless the masters of the world had been very poorly housed; but he admits that if the suburbs are added to the calculation, the number of inhabitants might be estimated as high as one judged appropriate. In the midst of these uncertainties, I can only stick with the moderate and well-reasoned calculations of Brottier and Gibbon. [On "Brottier," see above, p. 136, note 5.]

[11] This is what the tribune Philippus, haranguing the people in the year 649 from the Founding, said to them to excite them and to get them to decide for an agrarian law: *There were not in the state two thousand people who owned any property*; and Cicero, who reports this fact (*On Duties* 2.21) in blaming the intention of the tribune, does not contest the truth of the fact. In passing we can note how the multitude was influenced and how the gold of the aristocrats mocked the law *Julia de Ambitu*. [The *Lex Julia de Ambitu* was a law against corruption passed by Julius Caesar, hence "Julian."]

[12] *Had sought to heighten his own glory by the vilest of contrasts.* (Tacitus *Annals* 1.10) [Loeb.] But his effrontery turns against itself, for all comparison defames it.

that I will cite this passage from a report made to the National Convention in the name of three committees of the government:

"In the republics of antiquity," said the orator, "the exercise of the political rights of citizens was circumscribed in a very restricted territory, or within the walls of a single city. Outside the precinct of governments, one lived in an insupportable subjection; and, within their precinct the harshest slavery was established besides tumultuous liberty. The dignity of a few men was raised on the degradation of the majority. In these countries whose liberty has been so much vaunted to us, because a small number of privileged inhabitants have been mistaken for the people, the word *liberty* could not be pronounced without exciting the murmurs of a crowd of slaves; one could not pronounce the word *equality* without hearing the noise of their chains; and *fraternity* was never known in countries where a few free men constantly held under their domination a crowd of men condemned to servitude."[13]

They have not always spoken so honestly at the tribune of the National Convention; instead of being entranced with Roman liberty, we should reflect a little on what it cost the world, we should recall to what point proconsular haughtiness and arrogance debased the provinces. A Roman magistrate, in the midst of the subjects of the Republic, was really a kind of divinity, good or evil following the play of chance. It is impossible to describe all that the provinces suffered from these terrible magistrates when they pleased to do evil; there was no means of obtaining justice against them;[14] and even when their conduct was irreproachable, they still made their superiority felt in the harshest way. When they exercised their functions, they were not permitted to speak any other language than that of Rome; on the Euphrates as on the Guadalquivir one had to know Latin; they did not deign to suppose that any other language existed. They did not even make an exception for proud Greece. The compatriots of Demosthenes and Sophocles came to stammer before the tribunal of a proconsul, and were astonished to receive orders in Latin in the middle of the Prytaneum. The most distinguished man of his country, even if he were a king, if only a Roman citizen, did not dare to claim the honour of embracing the governor of a province, and history shows us a king of

[13] Session of 12 January. (*Moniteur*, no. 117, p. 482, 1795.)

[14] Verres, a simple praetor bearing an obscure name, carried out all kinds of crimes with impunity in Sicily; on his return to Rome, Cicero's eloquence, thundering five consecutive days against him in the name of an entire nation, got him exiled. If one calls this *justice*, one is not difficult to please.

the Parthians, asking for his brother, the king of Armenia, who was going to Rome, the privilege of embracing these superb magistrates.[15]

Antiquity's most vigorous painter having transmitted to us a faithful painting of Roman legislation under the republican regime, readers will thank me for placing it here. This is, in truth, a Roman history, made by a man who abridged everything because he saw everything.

"Upon the expulsion of Tarquin," he says, "the commons, to check senatorial factions, framed a large number of regulations for the protection of their liberties or the establishment of concord; the Decemvirs came into being;[16] and, by incorporating the best features of foreign constitutions, the Twelve Tables were assembled, the final instance of equitable legislation. For succeeding laws, though occasionally suggested by a crime and aimed at a criminal, were more often carried by brute force in consequence of class-dissension to open the way to an unconceded office, to banish a patriot, or to consummate some other perverted end. Hence our demagogues: our Gracchi and Saturnini, and on the other side a Drusus bidding as high in the senate's name; while the provincials were alternately bribed with hopes and cheated with tribunician vetoes. Not even the Italian war, soon replaced by the Civil war,[17] could interrupt the flow of self-contradic-

[15] Tacitus *Annals* 15.31. On this passage of Tactitus, Brottier reports an interesting anecdote. "Severus, who later succeeded to the empire, went to Africa whose government he had obtained. Walking one day, preceded by his lictors, he met an inhabitant of Leptines, his fellow citizen, whose guest he had been for a long time. This person, ignoring or forgetting the law that prohibited all provincials and even all plebeians from embracing the governor of a province, and seeing in Severus only an old friend, without reflection embraced him. Severus immediately had him beaten, and during the operation, the public crier addressed these consoling words to the patient: "Remember, plebeian, not to embrace thoughtlessly an envoy of the Roman people: LEGATUM POPULI ROMANI, HOMO PLEBEIUS, TEMERE AMPLECTI NOLI! And to avoid similar incidents, it was decided that the provincial governors should no longer go out on foot." (Spart. *in Serverus*. II.) This anecdote and that of the king of the Parthians were under the Empire, but the custom is from the Republic, and could not have begun under a monarchy.

[Tacitus reports the request of Corbulo, king of the Parthians, who asked Nero that Tiridates "should be exposed to none of the outward signs of vassalage, ... should not be debarred from embracing the provincial governors or be left to stand and wait at their doors, and in Rome should receive equal distinction with the consuls." *Annals* 15.31. (Loeb.) On "Brottier," see above, p.136, note 5.]

[16] We can be surprised that Tacitus did not mention in passing what price the Law of the Twelve Tables cost the Romans.

[17] [In 91–89 and 88–92 BCE before Sulla became dictator from 82 to 79. (Darcel. ed.)]

tory legislation; until Sulla, in his dictatorship, by abolishing or inverting the older statutes and adding more of his own brought the process to a standstill. But not for long. The calm was immediately broken by the Rogations of Lepidus, and shortly afterwards the tribunes repossessed their licence to disturb the nation as they pleased. And now bills began to pass, not only of national but of purely individual application, and when the state was most corrupt, laws were most abundant."

"Then came Pompey's third consulate. But this chosen reformer of society, operating with remedies more disastrous than the abuses, this maker and breaker of his own enactments, lost by the sword what he was holding by the sword. There followed twenty crowded years of discord, during which law and custom ceased to exist: villainy was immense, decency not rarely a sentence of death."[18]

This picture is neither suspect nor attractive; but if these abuses described by this great master were so frightful within the walls of Rome, what evils must they have produced in the provinces! It is easy to form an idea of them. So, when after the Battle of Actium, the government finally fell into the hands of a single man, this was a great day for the Roman empire; and Tacitus, although very enamoured of the Republic, as we see by a thousand comments in his works, is forced to admit that the provinces applauded a revolution that relieved them greatly. "Nor was the [new] state of affairs," he says, "unpopular in the provinces, where administration by the Senate and People had been discredited by the feuds of the magnates and the greed of the officials, against which there was but frail protection in a legal system for ever deranged by force, by favouritism, or (in the last resort) by gold."[19]

The same historian painted in a striking way, and probably without thinking about it, the sufferings of foreign nations under the empire of the Roman people. We know that when Augustus took over the affairs of state, nothing was changed exteriorly, and titles especially always remained the same.[20] The title of prince with which he contented

[18] Tacitus *Annals* 3.27–28. [Loeb.]

[19] Ibid., 1.2. [Loeb.]

[20] *At home all was calm. The officials carried the old names.* (Ibid., 1.3) [Loeb.] Not everyone has a clear idea of this change. The Abbé de La Bletterie has painted it perfectly well in his dissertation entitled: *L'Empereur au miliu du Sénat*, which can be found in the Memoirs of the Academie des inscriptions. [The Abbé Jean-Philippe de La Bletterie was the author of a *Vie de l'empereur Julien*, published in 1735 and republished a number of times in the eighteenth century. (Darcel ed.)]

himself, far from revealing the idea of king, was, for the Romans, below that of dictator;[21] so that Ovid, who certainly did not want to shock the ears of Augustus, in terminating his inimitable narration of the death of Lucretius and the expulsion of the Tarquins, could say without scruple:

Tarquin and his brood were banished. A consul undertook the government for a year. That day was the last of kingly rule.[22]

A normal consequence of this order of things was that the government of the provinces did not pass brusquely and completely into the hands of the emperor. It was only during his seventh consulate that Augustus divided the provinces, by a kind of deal, between the people and himself. The people's governors were called *proconsuls* and were named by lot, following republican forms; those of the emperor were named legates or praetors, and held their office by his choice. Now, although the despot of Rome, as one can imagine, sent to the provinces only *little rogues* and *little schemers*, there was nevertheless in a very short while such a difference in the state of the provinces submitted to the two regimes, and the subjects of the *people* found themselves so unfortunate compared to the subjects of the *prince*, that when, under Tiberius, Achaia and Macedonia asked to be relieved of the taxes that overwhelmed them, nothing better could be imagined to alleviate their lot, without harm to the public treasury, than to deliver them for the moment from the proconsular regime and give them to the emperor.[23]

The great misfortune of the Romans, and of the greatest part of the known world that was ruled by them, was that the revolution that was carried out at the accession of Augustus was not complete enough. What tears and crimes a hereditary monarchy would have saved the world! But all the old forms were preserved; they had a senate, consuls, tribunes, assemblies, and provincial governors *for the Roman people*. The prerogative of the emperors was rather a power of fact than a power of law; after having produced some monsters the Claudian family that reigned over opinion died out; there was no legal succession. Soon the legions revealed *the secret of the empire*, and emperors were made outside Rome. From all these circumstances

[21] *Yet he organized the state, not by instituting a monarchy or a dictatorship, but by creating the title of First Citizen.* (Ibid., 1.9). [Loeb.]

[22] Ovid *Fasti* 2.851–852. [Loeb.]

[23] *Since Achaia and Macedonia protested against the heavy taxation, it was decided to relieve them of the procunsular government for the time being and transfer them to the emperor.* (Tacitus *Annals* 1.76.) [Loeb.]

combined, there ensued a military and elective despotism, that is to say a permanent plague.

However the government of the emperors, like all others, became degraded only by nuances. Often the empire was possessed by great men, or by men of great merit; I do not believe that the Roman name was ever greater, and that the world, in general, enjoyed a greater sum of happiness than under the reigns of Trajan and the Antonines.

Take together the reigns of Augustus, Vespasian, Titus, Nerva, the Antonines, Trajan, the Severi, etc. During this period, 150 million men, who would have groaned under the rod of the republican proconsuls, enjoyed a happy existence; and even Rome, in place of the tumultuous enjoyments of liberty, had peace. I know that all the writers of this century wrote at Paris, *with the approbation* and *the privilege of the king*, to establish that liberty, with its daggers, its wars, its internal divisions, its seditions, its sublime intoxication, would be preferable to the shameful repose of servitude; I admire this poetry very much, but I will always maintain that Newton was right in prose when he called repose *rem prorsus substantialem.*[24]

And why look at only one point? Is the human species to be found only in capitals? They always speak of the people, and yet count them as nothing; it is to the cottagers that one would have to put most political questions. But in always talking of *humanity*, of *philanthropy*, and of the *general happiness*, it is always pride that speaks and regards only itself. Paging through Livy in his ivory tower, the young writer, tired of his obscurity, in his imagination invests himself in the role of a Roman citizen; he is the consul Popilius; he holds the famous rod and traces the redoubtable circle around the monarch; nations tremble; kings bow down before him; soon, his enthusiasm knows no bounds, his imagination debauched by vanity carries him in a triumphal chariot to the Capitol; kings in irons follow him, legions applaud him, and envy dies: he is god. Then he cries: "Oh divine liberty; oh sacred equality!" Do you think he bothers about the *people* and all that *Roman* greatness cost the subject nations? These little considerations do not stop him, and his eye stupidly fixed on the Capitol, he does not know how to see what Verres is doing in Sicily.

Not only were the good emperors better than the Republic for the mass of men, but I am persuaded that, under vicious and even detestable emperors, the subjects were happier than under the Republic.

The most vicious prince is not always the most dangerous. Louis XVI, with his goodness, did more harm to the people than Louis XI.

[24] [a very fundamental matter (or thing)]

In general, subjects have to fear in their sovereigns only the corrupting vices produced by weakness. Those that have a dark and cruel character dishonour the sovereign much more, but only weigh on capitals, or even on the leading classes of the capitals.

The historian Dio Cassius, writing about the abominable Tiberius, wrote one of those phrases one never forgets. "He had," he says, "a great number of good and bad qualities; and used them alternatively as if he possessed only one kind."[25]

What is important to notice, however, is that the people only experienced the first qualities. Tiberius maintained a severe economy in the administration of the public revenues; he did not permit provincial governors to trample on their subjects, and, like all tyrants of his kind, he arrogated to himself the exclusive privilege of crimes. Under his reign, the empire was peaceful, and the Roman armies were nowhere humiliated. Varus was avenged. Tiberius had the honour of giving a king to the Parthians and the Armenians;[26] that of the Thracians was led in chains to Rome;[27] the Gauls were chastised and returned to their duty.[28] The distinctive character of his administration was an aversion for novelties, and his first maxim was to leave all things in their place, for fear of spoiling them. He had a horror of anything that could trouble public peace.[29] Gold had no attraction for him,[30] and never did he obtain it by crimes; one saw him repudiate rich inheritances to leave them to those whom nature had called to succession,[31] and he never wanted to accept other legacies except through friendship.[32] He permitted army generals to apply to public monuments the riches they had taken from enemies of the State.[33] Without pity for that shameful poverty that is the daughter of immoral

[25] [*Roman Histories*] Book 53. Here is Tiberius, and the complete Tiberius. This stroke is worthy of the greatest master; it belongs to Tacitus, who let it escape him by distraction.

[26] Tacitus *Annals* 2.56; 6.32.

[27] Ibid., 2.66

[28] Ibid., 3.40.

[29] *Nothing gave Tiberius so much anxiety as that settlements once made should not be disturbed.* (Ibid., 2.65) [Loeb.]

[30] *For, as I often said, he was firm enough against pecuniary temptations.* (Tacitus *Annals* 5.18.) [In fact, *Annals* 3.18. Loeb.]

[31] Ibid., 2.48

[32] *He entered upon no bequest unless he had earned it by his friendship: strangers, and persons who were at variance with others and consequently named the sovereign as their heir, he kept at a distance.* (Ibid., 2.48) [Loeb.]

[33] Ibid., 3.72

prodigality, he often came to the assistance of indigent virtue;[34] he harshly rejected the prayers of a ruined noble who asked that he be supported for the sake of his great name;[35] but when an earthquake overturned a dozen cities in Asia Minor in one night, Tiberius forgot nothing to console the unfortunate inhabitants, and assisted them with magnificent gifts and tax exemptions.[36] A frightful fire having consumed all of Mount Celius at Rome, he opened his treasures and distributed his benefits with such impartiality, he was so good at the art of discovering the lonely and timid unfortunate and inviting him to share in the division of his gifts, that the nobles and the people equally accorded him their admiration and their recognition.[37]

If the provinces brought their requests to Rome, he carried them himself to the Senate; and, without allowing power to escape him, liked to enlighten himself by discussion.[38] A singular thing! Continuously prostrate servility seemed to irritate this atrocious character more than austere virtue and intrepid frankness. Everyone knows his exclamation on leaving the Senate: "*Oh men born for slavery.*" True merit could disarm him.

Piso, invested with the highest offices, was an honest man with impunity up the age of 80, and died in his bed without degrading himself a single time by a servile opinion.[39] Terentius was happier still: and not only did his noble and unbelievable boldness not cost him life or liberty, but Tiberius left it to the Senate to punish at its leisure by exile and death the vile accusers of this brave Roman knight.[40]

If ancient history was not, in great part, the history of five or six capitals, we would reason better on real politics; but it is easy to imagine that the peoples obedient to Tiberius in the breadth of his empire found themselves very happy, that the poughman, peacefully guiding his plough in the bosom of the most profound peace, recalled

[34] *But as he relieved the honourable poverty of the innocent, so he procured the removal, or accepted the resignation of the following senators ... prodigiously beggared by their vices.* (Ibid., 2.48) [Loeb.]

[35] Ibid., 2.38.

[36] Ibid., 2.47.

[37] *Thanks were returned to him; in the Senate by the noble; in the streets, by the voice of the people; for without respect of persons, and without the intercession of relatives, he had aided with his liberality even unknown sufferers whom he had himself encouraged to apply.* (Ibid., 4.64) [Loeb.]

[38] *[Tiberius ... vouchsafed to the senate] a shadow of the past by submitting the claims of the provinces to the discussion of its members.* (Ibid., 3.60) [Loeb.]

[39] Ibid., 6.10.

[40] Ibid., 6.8

with horror for his children the proconsuls and triumvirs of the Republic and disquieted himself very little over the heads of Senators that fell in Rome.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Summary of Rousseau's Judgements on the Different Forms of Government[1]

In hereditary monarchy, *everything moves toward the same goal, it is true, but this goal is not that public felicity, and the very force of the Administration is* constantly[2] *detrimental to the State. Kings want to be absolute. ... The best Kings want to be able to be wicked if it so pleases them ... Their personal interest is first of all that the people should be weak,* [and] *miserable. ... those who attain them [high positions] in monarchies are often merely petty troublemakers, petty rascals, petty intriguers, whose petty talents – which lead to high positions in royal Courts – serve only to reveal their ineptitude to the public as soon as these men are in place ...* [Even when the sovereign has talents he] *forgets the people's interests, and by misusing his excessive talents, makes them no less unhappy than does a stupid leader by his lack of talents.*[3]

In an elective monarchy, the *one to whom the State has been sold [... will ...] sell it in turn and compensate out of the expense of the poor for the money that has been extorted from him by the powerful. ... the peace then enjoyed under kings is worse than the disorder of the interregna.* [In hereditary monarchy] *an apparent tranquillity has been preferred to a wise administration; and ... the risk of having children, monsters, and imbeciles for leaders has been preferred to having to argue over the choice of good Kings. People have not considered that*

[1] [Maistre's chapter title continues: "Other Judgements of the Same Nature; Reflections on This Subject."]

[2] Here again is one of those shady concepts that swarm in Rousseau's philosophical works. Does he mean that the principle of government is contrary to that of this government? This proposition is worthy of a *madhouse*. Does he only mean that monarchy, like all human institutions, carries within itself principles of destruction? This is one of those truths that one reads on chalkboards.

[3] [*Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. vi. *CW*, 4:176-8.]

in being exposed to the risk of the alternative, they have almost all the odds against them. ... One consequence of this lack of coherence is the instability of royal government ... which ... cannot have a a fixed object for long, nor a consistent mode of conduct. ... a royal education necessarily corrupts those who receive it. ... It is surely deliberate self-deception, then, to confuse royal Government with that of a good King. In order to see what this government is in essence, it must be considered under stupid or wicked Princes; for either they are like this when they ascend the Throne, or the Throne makes them so.[4]

Hereditary aristocracy is quickly judged: *It is the worst of all governments.*[5]

Democracy supposes too *many things that are hard to combine. ... there is no Government so subject to civil wars and internal agitations as the Democratic or popular one, because there is none that tends so strongly and so constantly to change its form, nor that demands more vigilance and courage to be maintained in its own form. ... If there were a people of Gods, it would govern itself Democratically. Such a perfect*[6] *Government is not suited to men.*[7]

What follows from these learned condemnations is that each of these governments is the worst of the three; this is a very fine discovery.

We would miss a lot if this ridiculousness were lost to general ethics, and to politics which is a branch of it. It leads us to the most useful reflections; it helps us to know the principal illness of this

[4] *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. vi. [*CW*, 4:179–80.] Let us not forget that the man who wrote these things almost always lived by choice in monarchical states, and that he used the time he passed in his fatherland to blow up the fire that is raging there at this time.

[5] Ibid., Chap. v. [*CW*, 4:175.] I say nothing about elective aristocracy, which Rousseau courageously calls *Aristocracy properly so-called.* He forgets to explain what he means by this government, and I maintain that if this is not democracy, I do not know what it is.

[6] This *emphasized* epithet undoubtedly does not apply to democracy such as we see it and have seen it on earth, for Rousseau has just said every bad thing possible about it. Does it apply at least to theoretical democracy? No, for in theory all governments are perfect, and it costs the imagination even less to create an excellent king than an excellent people. So what does *so perfect a government* mean? Nothing. In all the pages of Rousseau's philosophical writings, we encounter expressions that make no sense, either for him or for us; often, he fails to think. His equivocal concepts gain apparent existence from the magic of style; but if the analyst comes with his scalpel, he finds nothing.

[7] [*Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. iv. *CW*, 4: 173–4.]

century and the character of the dangerous men who have done us so much harm.

Here is Rousseau who wants no form of government and who insults all of them. Monarchy is detestable; aristocracy is detestable; democracy is not any better; he cannot endure any form of government. England does not have the first idea of freedom. "The English people thinks it is free. It greatly deceives itself; it is free only during the election of the members of Parliament. As soon as they are elected, it is a *slave*, it is nothing. Given the use made of these brief moments of freedom, the people certainly deserves to lose it."[8]

The very duration of the Venetian Republic proves that it is worthless. "The semblance of ... [the republic of Venice] still exists uniquely because its laws are only suited to wicked men."[9]

Batavian liberty displeases Mably: "The government of this Republic deformed itself since it changed a dictatorship, which must be reserved for short and difficult times, into an ordinary magistracy. The stadholder is still only a lion cub they keep on a chain; but he only needs to break it to become a lion. Let us speak plainly; everything invites this prince to ruin his country."

Voltaire does not desire antique liberty; he calls it *government by the mob*. But he likes monarchy even less, and for the civil and religious instruction of nations, he cries out:

> O Wisdom of Heaven! I believe you very profound;
> But to what dull tyrants have you delivered the world![10]

An orator of the National Convention, again last year, cursed the ashes of the Girondins for having wanted to reduce the French nation to the level of the Greeks and Romans. "They also wanted liberty, they said, but like in Lacedaemon and in Rome," – the monsters! – "that is to say, liberty subordinated to the aristocracy of talents, wealth and pride."[11]

Condorcet did not think much better of the ancients. "These men that you had the simplicity to admire never knew how to establish anything but *a despotic anarchy*; and those who look for lessons from them are pedants."

However he wanted liberty: perhaps he went to look for it in wise and peaceful Switzerland? Still less.

[8] *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. xv. [*CW*, 4:192. Maistre's italics.]

[9] Ibid., Bk. IV, chap. iv. [*CW*, 4:210.]

[10] [*Epitre LI, A Madame le Marquise du Chatelet, Oeuvres complètes*, 10:304.]

[11] Garnier de Saints. Session of 21 September 1794. (*Moniteur* no. 5, p. 22.)

"The governments of this country conserve there only the appearance and language of republican constitutions; and, in carefully guarding there all the forms of equality, distinctions are not less real than those that separate the leading slaves of a despot from the least of his subjects."[12]

A Swiss philosopher, undoubtedly a disciple of these great men, judges his country even more severely: "In the democratic states of Switzerland," he says, "if one excepts the intriguers, the place seekers, vile, vain, and wicked men, drunkards and sluggards, there is not a single happy and contented man in the Republic."[13]

But this Condorcet, who wanted freedom so totally and who wanted to establish it on the ruins of thrones, had he at least seen it somewhere on earth? No, "never had he seen a truly republican constitution" and such as what he wanted.[14]

Good God, what then did he want! And what do all these philosophers want, since nothing that exists or that has existed can have the good fortune of pleasing them? They do not want any government, because there are none that do not demand obedience; it is not *this* authority that they detest, but *authority* itself; they cannot endure any. But if you press them, like Turgot, they will tell you that what they want is *a great democracy*.[15] Condorcet had already drawn this *great* square circle with his learned hand; but, as we know, this plan did not succeed.

It would be useless to multiply these foolish citations; it is enough that we recall this excellent phrase from Rousseau who was always right when he spoke against himself: "If I consult philosophers, each has only his voice." Mortal enemies of all kinds of association, possessing a loathsome and solitary pride, they agree on only one point: the rage to destroy. Since each wants to substitute for what displeases him visions acceptable to himself alone, the result is that all their power is negative, and all their efforts to build are powerless and

[12] Condorcet, *Eloge d'Euler*. [*Eloge de M. Euler, introduction á l'analyse des infiniment petits* (Strasbourg 1786). Maistre had already used this same passage in his *Cinquième lettre d'un royaliste savoisien*, where he described Condorcet as a "famous member of the National Convention, a rascal of the first order and geometer of the second." (*REM* no. 4 (1978): 47.) In his "Reflections on Protestantism," Maistre called Condorcet "perhaps the most odious of revolutionaries and the most fiery enemy of Christianity." *OC*, 8:91. (Darcel ed.)]

[13] "Moyen de faire de la République française un tout á jamais indivisible," Brochure by a Swiss, *Courrier républicain*, no. 558, p. 128.

[14] *Vie de Turgot*, p. 106.

[15] Ibid.

ridiculous. Oh misguided men, learn for once at last to recognize these dangerous jugglers, let them admire themselves all alone, and rally to the national reason that never deceives. Remember that each nation has, in its laws and its ancient customs, all that it needs to be as happy as it can be, and that in taking these venerable laws as the bases for all your regenerative efforts, you can achieve all your perfectibility without delivering yourselves to deadly innovations.

Raise yourselves again to higher thoughts. Eternal reason has spoken, and its infallible oracles show us that pride is *the beginning of all crimes*; this terrible principle has been unchained in Europe ever since these same philosophers have relieved you of the faith of your fathers. Hatred of authority is the scourge of our time; the only remedy for this evil is the sacred maxims that they have made you forget. Archimedes knew well that to raise the world he needed a fulcrum outside the world.

The enemies of all order have hit on the fulcrum they need to overthrow the moral world.[16] It is atheism and immorality that prompt revolt and insurrection. See what is happening under your eyes; at the first sign of revolutions, virtue hides itself, and the only thing you see acting any more is crime. What is this liberty whose founders, supporters, and apostles are scoundrels? Ah! You have the means to accomplish great and salutary revolutions. Instead of listening to the preachers of revolt, work on yourselves: for it is you who make governments, and they cannot be bad if you are good.[17]

Human wisdom, however, with less motive and less enlightenment, uses the same language, and you can believe it when it tells you that "the highest good for an empire, for an army, and for a family, is obedience."[18]

Marchamont Needham [*sic*], a feeble precursor of Rousseau who reasoned as poorly as the citizen of Geneva, but who was, in addition,

[16] [Darcel seems to have inadvertently omitted this sentence from his critical edition. See *OC*, 1:525.]

[17] An English preacher, on a solemn feastday in 1793, gave a sermon with the title: "Sins of government, sins of the nation." (*London Chronicle*, 1793, No. 5747, p. 58) I do not know if the title was fulfilled as it could have been, but the title alone is a great truth and worth a book.

[18] Xenophon *The Constitutions of the Lacedoemonians* 8.3. [After having affirmed at the beginning of chapter 8 that Sparta is the city "where the magistrates and the laws are best obeyed," Xenophon adds that "it is probable also that these same citizens helped to set up the office of Ephor, having come to the conclusion that obedience is a great blessing whether in a state or an army or a household." (Trans. E.C. Marchant, Loeb Classical Library 1962) (Darcel ed.)]

dull and verbose, said that *in a popular government* "the door of dignity stands open open to all that ascend the steps of worth and virtue: the consideration whereof hath this noble effect in free states, that it edges mens' spirits with an active emulation, and raiseth them to a lofty pitch of design and action."[19]

His French translator adds, following Shaftesbury: "A free government is for the arts what healthy soil is for vigorous plants. This is why free nations are carried to such a high point of perfection in such a short time, while much larger and more powerful empires, when they are under the yoke of despotism, after centuries of leisure, produce only unformed and barbarous essays."[20]

And according to Ceruti, an author a little less respectable: "Similar to those plants that require the most fertile soil and the most favourable climate to grow, it is only in the fortunate climate of glory, on soil blessed with honours, that one can hope to see eloquence be born and be fruitful."[21]

Hume had a quite different view when he said: "I am ashamed to admit that Patru pleading for the restitution of a horse is more eloquent

[19] *De la souveraineté du peuple et de l'excellence d'un état libre*, French translation [1790], 1:57. [Marchamont Nedham was well known in eighteenth-century France for his *The Excellency of a Free State above a kingly Government*, a work published under Cromwell's Protectorate, in which he established the principle of popular sovereignty. This work was first published in *Mercurius Politicus* between February 1651 and August 1652, and then as a volume in 1656; it was republished in 1767 and 1774. The book was published in French under the title *Discours touchant la supériorité d'un Etat libre sur le gouvernement monarchique* (1650 and 1767), and then in 1790 under the title Maistre cites. I have given the English of the 1767 edition. It was Bishop Bovet who advised Maistre to read Nedham, whom Bovet called Rousseau's precursor. See *REM* no. 4 (1978): 81.]

[20] Ibid. French translator [Théophile Mandar], preface, p. v. [Shaftesbury's original English version runs as follows: "Hence it is that those arts have been delivered to us in such perfection by free nations, who from the nature of their government, as from a proper soil, produced the generous plants; whilst the mightiest bodies and vastest empires, governed by force and a despotic power, could, after ages of peace and leisure, produce no other than what was deformed and barbarous of the kind." *Characteristics* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill 1964), 155.]

[21] Ibid., p. 57. [Joseph Ceruti (1738–1792) was a Jesuit who made a career as a writer in France. He was the author of *Apologie de l'institut et de la doctrine des jésuites* (1762) and a *Mémoire pour le peuple française* (1789). The liberal view of the second won him noteriety. Mirabeau used Ceruti as a ghost writer.]

than orators agitating the greatest interests in the assemblies of Parliament."[22]

Indeed, France is the most eloquent of nations, not only because its orators properly speaking surpass all others, but because it has carried eloquence into all genres of composition, and no nation has spoken better on everything. The influence that France has on Europe is due in the first place to this talent, unfortunately too well demonstrated at the moment I am writing.[23]

It must be admitted, therefore, that the French nation was free under its kings, or that liberty is not necessary for eloquence. I leave the choice to these great philosophers. What I say of eloquence must be said of all the arts and all the sciences; it is so false that they need liberty, that in free states they only flourish with the decline of liberty.

The most beautiful monuments of Athens belong to the century of Pericles. In Rome, what writers were produced under the Republic? Only Plautus and Terence. Lucretius, Sallust, and Cicero saw the Republic die. Then came the century of Augustus when the nation was all that it could be by way of talents. The arts, in general, need a king; they only flourish under the influence of sceptres. Even in Greece, the only country were they flourished in the milieu of a republic, Lysippos and Apelles worked for Alexander.[24] Aristotle owed to Alexander's generosity the means to compose his history of animals;[25] and, after the death of this monarch, the poets, scholars, and artists went to look for protection and rewards in the courts of his successors.[26]

[22] *Essais*, Vol. ? [sic]

[23] However this talent, like Achilles's lance, can cure the wounds it has caused. Nations, like individuals, have a mission in this world; it is probable that that of the French nation is not completed, and as France, to fulfill the views for which it is destined, needed to preserve its integrity, it preserved it against all human probablities. *Populi meditati sunt inania.* ["The peoples plot in vain." Psalm 2:1 RSV] Reduced by our weak nature to attaching ourselves to probablities, let us at least grasp that there are fertile probablities just as there are sterile truths.

[24] [Lysippos, a Greek sculptor of bronze in the 4th century BCE, was famous for the realism of his compositions; Apelles was the most famous Greek painter of the 4th century BCE. (Darcel ed.)]

[25] [*Historia Animalium*, an introduction to biology, in which Aristotle classified animals, their methods of reproduction, and their evolution.]

[26] "Now to the holy games of Dionysus comes one who can tune his song clear, but he carries away a guerdon answering to his gifts. And in their turn to the Muses' spokesmen Ptolemy praise for his bounty – for what fairer fame can wealth bring a man than to be named among men?" (Theocritus, Idyll XVII, *Encomium Ptolemoei*) [Maistre cited a Latin translation of the Greek poem. I have provided

What does Needham mean to say when he suggests that only popular governments produce that noble emulation that leads to the conception of the most beautiful plans?

What does Shaftesbury mean to say when he maintains that "free nations have carried the arts to the highest point of perfection in a short time, and that the largest and most powerful empires, when they are under the yoke of despotism, after centuries of leisure, produce only unformed or barbarous essays"?

One would be tempted to believe that they are joking. Sparta and free Rome never gave birth to a poem nor cut a column.[27] And was it not under the regime of liberty that Horace jokingly wrote:

> No, never were mortals more happy!
> We sang, we combed our hair better than these famous Greeks.

The *Aeneid* was created for Augustus; the frontispiece of the *Pharsalia* is decorated by a beautiful eulogy of Nero. Ariosto and Tasso flattered pettier princes, it is true; however, they were princes. Voltaire, born in Paris, dedicated the *Henriade* to an English queen. Finally, if one excepts Milton, who shone in a moment of general frenzy and seems to have written only, as Voltaire says, *for the angels, for the devils, and for the mad,* all the epic poets sang for kings to amuse kings.

The author of *Cinna*[28] was paid by a look from Louis XIV; it was for Louis that Racine *gave birth to his miracles*; *Tartuffe*[29] and *Armide*[30] distracted the king from business; and *Télémaque*,[31] which he did not study enough, was nevertheless a production of his reign.

Anna Rist's English translation: Theocritus, *An Encomium (to Ptolemy), Idyll XVII, The Poems of Theocritus* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1978).

[27] *We too who are inexperienced in these matters.* (Cicero *Verres Orations.*)

[28] [A tragedy by Corneille.]

[29] [*Tartuffe ou l'imposteur*, a verse comedy in five acts by Molière, was presented before Louis XIV in 1664. (Darcel ed.)]

[30] [*Armide*, a lyric tragedy in five acts by Philippe Quinault (1635–1688), was set to music by Jean-Baptiste Lully (1633–1687); this next to last opera by Lully was presented in Paris in 1686. (Darcel ed.)]

[31] [Fénelon's didactic romance written for the edification of his pupil, the Duke of Burgundy, grandson of Louis XIV and heir to the French throne, included a description of an ideal king that greatly offended the Sun King.]

In our time, we have seen Metastasio, abandoning his own country, too parcelled up for his genius, coming to seek the leisure and protection that he needed in Vienna.[32]

As for great movements and great enterprises, they belong only to monarchies, for the simple reason that republics are always small and poor, so that what they do is also small.

The most famous republic of all was Athens; but what could a republic do that had only 20,000 citizens, whose revenues scarcely exceeded three million of our money,[33] who paid its ambassadors two drachmas a day, that is to say 40 sous of this same money,[34] and to which Demosthenes said in the moment of greatest danger: "So I say that in all you need 2,000 foot soldiers, all foreigners; as long as there are 500 Athenians, I am not opposed to this. ... Let us add to this 200 cavalry, of which at least 50 must be Athenians."[35]

What can such powers do by way of enterprises and monuments? Fortify a mediocre city and decorate it. But the pyramids, the temples, the canals, and the reservoirs of Egypt, the palaces and walls of Babylon, etc., belong only to immense countries, that is to say, to monarchies.

Was it a republican hand that weighed the air? that traced the meridians of Uranienborg, Boulogne, and Paris? that carried the pendulum to Cayenne? that measured the degrees of the meridian at Quito, Torneo, Paris, Rome, Turin, and Vienna? Was it in the bosom of republics that the four giants, Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and Descartes were born, who overturned the edifice of prejudice and made room for Newton?

The intrepid navigators from Christopher Columbus to Cook, who discovered new countries, brought men together, and so greatly

[32] [Pietro Metastasio (1698–1782) was an Italian poet and dramatist who in 1735 became the court poet at Vienna, where he served both the Emperor Charles VI and the Empress Maria Theresa.]

[33] Xenophon, on the revenues of Athens, where, if I am not mistaken, he talks about mines.

[34] "Athens, in the time of its greatest splendor, only paid its ambassadors two drachmas per day." (Larcher's note on Herodotus 3.131.) In place of the original, which I lack, I can cite a modern and exact scholar.

[35] Demosthenes *First Philippics* 21. Olivet trans. [Another translation reads: "So I propose that the whole force should consist of two thousand men, but of these five hundred must be Athenians, ... the rest should be mercenaries. Attached to this shall be two hundred cavalry, fifty at least of them being Athenians." Trans. J.H. Vince, Loeb Classical Library 1962.]

improved astronomy, geography, and all the branches of natural history, did they not all carry crowns on their flags?

As for the arts, Greece shone in this genre, not because liberty was necessary for them (this is a great error), but because the Greeks were destined to republican government, and no nation deploys all its talents except under the government that suits it.

However if the buildings of Palmyra and of ancient Rome;[36] if the mosque of Cordova and the palace of the Alhambra; if the Church of St Peter, the fountains, palaces, museums, and libraries of Christian Rome; if the colonnade of the Louvre, the gardens of Versailles, and the arsenals of Brest, Toulon, and Turin; if the paintings of Michelangelo, Raphael, Correggio, Poussin, and Lesueur; if the statues of Girardon, Puget, Coston, and Colin; if the music of Pergolesi, Jomelli, Gluck, and Cimarosa; if all these things, I say, which are nevertheless the productions of human genius bowed *under the yoke of despotism*, appear to Shaftesbury and to those who think like him, *only unformed and barbarous essays*, it must be admitted that these philosophers are very difficult to satisfy.

What is curious is that while these censors of *despotism* accuse it of *stupefying* men and rendering them incapable of great productions of genius, others, on the contrary, accuse it of corrupting and enchaining men by turning them too much towards pleasures of this kind. "Those [centuries] in which letters and arts have flourished," says Rousseau, "have been overly admired, without discovering the secret object of their cultivation and without considering its disastrous effect, *idque apud imperitos humanitas vocabatur, quum pars servitutis esset.*"[37] Poor monarchy! They accuse it at the same time of brutalizing nations and of giving them too much wit.

Let us again consider governments with respect to population. "The best," Rousseau says again, "is that which peoples the most." He did not understand himself, as we saw above, when he advanced this maxim; it would be necessary to say that "a people is well governed when, under the influence of its particular government, its population reaches the highest possible point, relative to the extent of its territory, or it gradually approaches this point."

[36] The antique monuments that we go to Rome to admire are almost all posterior to the Republic, which took no pride in taste. *Tu regere imperio*, etc. [The complete citation reads "*tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento.*" "Remember thou, O Roman, to rule the nations with thy sway." Virgil *Aeneid* 6:845. Loeb.]

[37] *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. ix, note. [*CW*, 4:185. The Latin is from Tacitus *Agricola* 31. In English, "Fools called 'humanity' what was a part of slavery."]

However the highest point possible depends in no way on such and such a form of government. An ancient poet said in a eulogy for the first of the Ptolemies: "No country is the world is more fruitful than Egypt. One counts 33,339 cities under the sceptre of Ptolemy. ... Shall I speak of the immensity of his military forces? His riches efface that of all other kings. Each day and from everywhere they flow to his palace. His industrious people work without fear in the bosom of peace. No foreigner dares invade the Nile and trouble the peaceful works of the peaceful farmer, etc."[38]

Suppose, if you wish, some exaggeration in the number of cities, although it is expressed in a very precise way; suppose as well that the poet has abused the word *city* to a certain extent; there will always remain for us a truly extraordinary idea of wealth and relative population.

We are assured, Herodotus says, that "Egypt was never more happy nor more flourishing than under Amasis.[39] *This country* then contained more than 20,000 cities, all well peopled."[40]

"Egypt," says another historian, "was formerly the most populated country in the world; and still in our time, I do not believe it less so than any other. In ancient times it possessed more than 18,000 cities or considerable towns, as is attested by its sacred registers; and, under the

[38] Theocritus, *Encomium Ptolemoei.* Idyll XVII, v. 94, 99. Translation by M. Zamagna. One can reproach this translation, otherwise so exact, and whose first verses especially are a masterpiece, of leaving some doubt if the 33,339 cities were found in Eygpt alone, or in all the countries obeying Ptolemy. The text does not permit the least doubt on this point.

[In his note, Maistre cites a Latin verse translation of Theocritus by Bernardo Zamagna, SJ, published under the title *Theocrati, Bionis et Moschi Idyllia omnia a Bernardo Zamagna ... latins versibus expressa* (Senis 1788). (Darcel ed.) Anna Rist's English translation of the lines in the note reads: "countless tribes of men have wheat that the rains of Zeus nurture to ripeness, but none so much as the low-lying land of Egypt grows ... nor has any so many settlements of skilled husbandmen, for thrice a hundred cities are founded in Egypt, and then thrice a thousand and thrice ten thousand and three times nine and two times three - and of all Lord Ptolemy is King!" Her translation of the lines Maistre cites in the body of the text reads: "In substance he outweighs all other princes, such the wealth that rolls into his palace from all sides, day by day. And his people pursue their callings at ease; no enemy crosses the teeming Nile afoot to raise a shout in their hamlets." (See note 26 above.)]

[39] [Egypian pharaoh whose long reign (traditionally dated 569–525 BCE) was remembered for its prosperity.]

[40] Herodotus 2.177. See Larcher's note on this passage.

reign of Ptolemy, son of Lagus, they were reckoned at more than 30,000."[41]

"Calculators, it is up to you now. Count, measure, compare."[42] See how in Egypt, not only under the reign of the Ptolemies, but even under the theocratic despotisms of its ancient kings, "without external aid, without natuaralization, without colonies – the Citizens populate and multiply the most."[43]

In the 25 December 1794 session of the National Convention, it was said, in the name of the Commerce Committee, that "Spain, before the expulsion of the Moors, had eighty cities of the first rank and fifty million inhabitants."[44]

The reporter who copied this, from the *Précis historique sur les Maures* it would seem, should have said that these eighty cities of the first rank were to be found in the states of the Caliph of Cordova alone,[45] which also contained three hundred of the second rank and an infinite number of villages. Cordova alone contained within its walls two hundred thousand houses. The ambassadors of the Greek empire came to this immense city to prostrate themselves before the caliph to obtain from him assistance against the caliphs of Bagdad who were pressing the empire of Constantinople.

The Moorish kings of Granada, in a state eighty leagues wide by thirty leagues long, possessed fourteen large cities, more than a hundred small cities, and a prodigious number of villages. They had one hundred thousand regular troops, and this army could easily be doubled in time of need. The city of Granada alone furnished fifty thousand warriors.[46]

And these Moors, so formidable under arms, were as well the best farmers, the most excellent artists, the most active merchants, and the leading men in the world in all the branches of science.

[41] Diodorus Siculus [*The Library of History*] 131. Larcher does not want to accept the reading of "thirty thousand," which some manuscripts have, which seems to him against all likelihood. However it accords with the testimony of Theocritus and other ancient writers better than the three thousand he adopts, and which appears absolutely inadmissible, if one observes only the context of ideas in Diodorus's text.

[42] Rousseau, *Contrat social*, Bk. III, chap. ix. [*CW*, 4:185.]

[43] Ibid.

[44] *Moniteur*, no. 96, December 1794.

[45] These states comprised only Portugal, Andulusia, the realms of Granada, Murcia, Valencia, and the largest part of New Castile.

[46] [M.] Florian, *Précis historique sur les Maures d'Espagne* [Paris 1791], pp. 51, 57, and 113.

Today, all of Spain, united under the sceptre of the same sovereign, has only ten and a half million inhabitants.[47]

However, there never existed a more severe despotism than that of the caliphs. Rousseau, who read so many novels, no doubt recalled reading in the *Thousand and One Nights* the passage where the vizier says to his daughter Dinazarde: "You know, my daughter, *that if the sultan orders me to kill you, I would be obliged to obey him.*"

The civil and military despotism of the caliphs is therefore *infallibly the best government*,[48] or, at least, it is worth more than a tempered monarchy, since, under the same sky, on the same territory, and in the midst of the most unflagging and cruel wars known to history, the general and partial population increased to a point that seems incredible, compared to what we see in our time.

And what is very essential to observe is that nations never achieve this point of population without a great moral energy that all nations possess, more or less, at a certain period in their political life. All the modern teachers of revolt, from the cedar to the hyssop, repeat in emulation of each other that despotism debases souls. This is another error; despotism is bad only when it is introduced into a country made for another form of government, or when it is corrupted in a country where it has its place. However, when this government is in its prime, the nation is great and energetic in its own way, as much and perhaps more than republics.

Were those astonishing Arabs, then, vile and effeminate men, who covered half the globe, the Koran in one hand and the sword in the other, crying: "*Victory and paradise*"? Let us transport ourselves to Omar's century: "Asia trembled before him, and the terrible Moslems, modest in their victories, related their successes to God alone, conserving in the midst of the most beautiful, richest, and most delicious countries on earth, in the bosom of the most corrupt peoples, their frugal and austere morals, their severe discipline, and their own respect for poverty. One saw ordinary soldiers stop suddenly in the sack of a city on the first order of their chief, faithfully carrying to him the gold and silver that they had removed, to deposit it in the public treasury. One saw these captains, so brave, so magnificent toward kings, giving up and taking command on a note from the caliph,

[47] According to the census carried out by Count Florida Blanca with all possible exactness, and published at Madrid by the order of the king (1787). N.B. The population has grown by a million during the last eighteen years. (*European Magazine*, December 1790, p. 403.)

[48] Rousseau, in the chapter just cited.

becoming in turn generals, ordinary soldiers, ambassadors, at his slightest wish. Again, one saw Omar himself, the most powerful sovereign, the richest and greatest king of Asia, set off on a journey to Jerusalem mounted on a russet camel, carrying sacks of barley and rice, with a full water-skin and a wooden vase. Thus equipped he travelled through the midst of conquered nations, who presented themselves on his passage, who asked him to bless them and judge their differences. He joined his army, preached simplicity, valour, and modesty to it; he entered Jerusalem, pardoned the Christians, preserved the churches, and, remounted on his camel, returned to Medina to pray for his people."[49]

The Turks, under Suleiman II, were all they could be and all that they had to be; Europe and Asia trembled before them. The famous Busbecq observed them at this time, and we have his account of his ambassadorship. Few more curious memorials exist. This man had a good eye, and his public character put him in a position to examine everything. It is interesting to see how he judged this government. One of the things that astonished him the most was its military discipline. He saw a camp; the description that he left us makes us experience the sentiment and emotion he experienced himself. In the midst of innumerable legions of turbans, he heard not the least noise. Everywhere there was this terrible silence of discipline;[50] nowhere did one perceive the least disorder or the least agitation. Each kept to his place with the greatest ease, the general officers seated, the others standing.[51] But nothing drew his attention like the imposing aspect of some thousands of janissaries that he saw in the distance. Busbecq, warned

[49] Florian, *Précis historique sur les Maures* (1792), p. 21. Those who know the history of the Arabs will not accuse this writer of having painted with his imagination.

[50] "For the nonce, take your stand by my side, and look at the sea of turbaned heads. ... I was greatly struck with the silence and order that prevailed in the crowd. There were no cries, no hum of voices." (Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters,* Letter 1) [English translation by Ch. Th. Forster and F.H.G. Daniell, *The Life and Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq* (London 1881, reprinted by Slatkine Reprints, Geneva 1971). Busbecq (1522–1592), Flemish diplomat and memorialist, was an ambassador to Turkey in the time of Suleiman II; his memoirs appeared under the title *Augerii Gislenii busbequii. Legationis turcicae epistolae quatuor* (Paris 1589, and later editions). Maistre, a bibliophile always on the lookout for beautiful editions, had acquired a precious 1633 Elzevir edition. (Darcel ed.)]

[51] "Neither was there any jostling; without the slightest disturbance each man took his proper place according to rank. The Agas, as they call their chiefs, were seated. ... Men of a lower position stood." (Ibid.)

that etiquette required a salute on his part, saluted the janissaries, who all together rendered him their salute in silence. *Up to then*, he says, *I did not know if I was seeing men or statues*.[52] The armies and their equipment were magnificent; but, in the midst of this military luxury, one saw a taste for simplicity and economy.[53]

How he scorned the flabbiness of our armies when he compared them to the sobriety, the moderation, and invincible patience of the Turkish soldier![54]

Burning under his pen, we see the national enthusiasm of the Turks and this moral vigour that accomplishes great things. He makes us see, he makes us hear this soldier, dying on the field of battle, who said to those who surrounding him: *Go and tell my country that I am dying for glory and for the advancement of my religion*;[55] he renders for us the cry of his exalted companions who cry out: "*Oh most happy of men! Who cannot envy your lot?*"[56]

However, when the same observer passed from the examination of the military regime to that of the civil constitution of the Turks, one sees clearly that he found us as inferior, from the general point of view, as he found us under the particular aspect of arms. What he says about the nobility merits special attention. He is shocked by the exclusive privilege of this order in Christian states; and the Turks appear to him much wiser. Here, he says, "great actions obtain honours

[52] "The most interesting sight in this assembly was a body of several thousand Janissaries, who were drawn up in a long line apart from the rest; their array was so steady and motionless that, being at some distance, it was some time before I could make up my mind as to whether they were human beings or statues." (Ibid.)

[53] "In all this luxury great simplicity and economy are combined." (Ibid.)

[54] "From this you will see that it is the patience, self denial, and thrift of the Turkish soldier that enable him to face the most trying circumstances, and come safely out of the dangers that surround him. What a contrast to our men!" (Ibid. Letter III)

[55] This beautiful sentiment recalls the well-known epithet of the 300 Spartans killed at Thermopylae:

Dic, hospes, patriae, nos te hic videsse jacentes
Dum sanctis patriae legibus obsequimur.

["Go tell the Spartans, passerby, that we in obedience to their laws lie here." Maistre cites a Latin translation of the original Greek by Simonides of Ceos.]

But here it is the dying heroes who give the commission, while at Thermopylae it is the marble that speaks for the dead.

[56] *Oh men thrice happy and thrice blessed!* etc. (Busbecq, Letter III.)

and power; among us, it is otherwise; birth obtains everything and merit nothing."[57]

Elsewhere, he dwells more on the same topic: "It is the prince," he says, "who distributes offices, and his choice is not determined by wealth, by the caprice of noble birth, by the protection of an individual, or by the judgement of the multitude. Only virtues, conduct, character, and talents are taken into consideration; and each is rewarded in proportion to his merit."[58]

Finally, Busbecq, in comparing us to the Turks, cannot help seeing on the one side *all the virtues that make empires shine, and on the other all the vices that lead them to ruin.* Courage abandoned him, and he was on the point of despairing for the salvation of Christendom.[59]

Mably, in Busbecq's place, would not have manifested these preoccupations; he knew that for the "subjects of despotic princes, and especially for the Turks, there are no other virtues than patience, and some useful slavish qualities compatible with laziness and fear."

These schoolboy banalities would be good (for everything that amuses is good) if they did not have the drawback of acting on weak heads, and always making them more confused and dangerous.

The Turks are weak at the moment, and other nations are overrunning them, because these disciples of the Koran have wit and schools of science, because they know French, and because they do European military exercises; in a word, because they are no longer Turks. When

[57] "Among the Turks, therefore, honours, high posts, and judgeships are the rewards of great ability and good service. ... with us there is no opening left for merit; birth is the standard of everything." (Ibid., Letter I)

[58] "In making his appointments the Sultan pays no regard to any pretentions on the score of wealth or rank, nor does he take into considerations recommendations or popularity; he considers each case on its own merits, and examines carefully into the character, ability, and disposition of the man whose promotion is in question." (Ibid.)

[59] "It makes me shudder to think of what the result of a struggle between such different systems must be: one of us must prevail and the other must be destroyed, at any rate we cannot both exist in safety. On their side is the vast wealth of their empire, unimpaired resources, experience and practice in arms, a veteran soldiery, an uninterrupted series of victories, readiness to endure hardships, union, order, discipline, thrift, and watchfulness. On ours are found an empty exchequer, luxurious habits, exhausted resources, broken spirits, a raw and insubordinate soldiery, and greedy generals; there is no regard for discipline, license runs riot, the men indulge in drunkenness and debauchery, and, worst of all, the enemy are accustomed to victory, we, to defeat." (Ibid., Ep. III.)

"I hope that we do not have to know what our arms are capable of when compared to these." [Busbecq], *Art of War Against the Turks.*

we speak of their ignorance and barbarism, we may be right; but if this is with a view to blaming their government, we do not know what we are saying.

In general, we understand almost nothing about the totality of things, and in this we are too easily excusable, but we are not excused for being ignorant that this totality exists. Descartes' imaginary world represents quite well the reality of the political world: each nation is a particular vortex, at once acting and being acted upon: the *whole* is only the totality of these vortexes, and the nations are between themselves like the individuals that compose them. Each member of these great families that we call *nations* has received a character, faculties, and a particular mission. Some are destined to slip in silence along the path of life without making their passage noted; other make noise in passing, and nearly always they have fame instead of happiness. Individual faculties are infinitely diversified with a divine magnificence, and the most brilliant are not the most useful; but all serve, every one is in its place; all play a part in the general organization, all move unswervingly toward the goal of the association.

Among this crowd of individuals, there are those who seem born under a hidden anathema. There are madmen, imbeciles, physically and morally degraded beings; all that we know of them is that they are there. Of what use is the Alpine *idiot*? Ask this of the one who made Newton's brain.

It is the same with nations as with individuals. All have a character and a mission that they fulfil without realizing what they are doing. Some are scholars, and others conquerors; and again, general characteristics are infinitely diversified. Among conquering nations, some are purely destructive, while others seem to destroy only to make room for creations of a new kind. The Orientals have always been contemplatives; intuition seems more natural to them than reason. As they live more within themselves and as they work on exterior objects less than we do, their souls are more open to spiritual impressions. Thus, all religions come from Asia.

Among scholarly nations, there are those who show little or no talent for such and such a genre of knowledge; others seem to cultivate all kinds with about equal success; finally, still others are carried towards a certain kind of science in a striking way, and then they almost always abuse it.

Thus, the Arabs, who have a prodigious talent for medicine and chemistry, have given themselves over to magic and all its operation; and the Chaldeans, who were great astonomers, gave themselves over to astrology, to the point that the name *Chaldean* subsequently became

synonymous with that of astrologer. Even Paracelsus and Kepler were two types of these nations.

The French invent nothing and they teach everything. They have very little talent for medicine; and, if we except Sénac's book on the heart,[60] which even belongs more to physiology than to medicine properly speaking, I doubt that France has produced a single original work in this science.

The English, on the contrary, are greatly distinguished in this genre; and while the study of medicine is carried on in other countries by a great number of men, even able men, to the point of materialism, English doctors on the contrary present a *constellation* of names as distinguished by their moral and religious character as by their profound knowledge.[61]

I would be departing from my subject if I pushed these observations further; it is enough to bring home how ridiculous we are when we accuse such and such government of debasing nations. No nation owes its character to its government, any more than its language; on the contrary, it owes its government to its character, which, in truth, is always subsequently reinforced and perfected by its political institutions. If you see a nation languish, it is not because its government is bad; it is because this government, which is the best for this nation, has fallen into decline, like everything human, or rather because its national character is worn out. Then nations must undergo political regeneration, or they simply die. There is nothing less well founded than our eternal discourses on the ignorance of Orientals; these men know what they must know, they move towards a general end; they obey the universal law, just as well as we who make brochures. Moreover, ignorance stems neither from climate, nor religion, nor government; the character of nations has more profound roots. Everyday they repeat that Mohammadanism favours ignorance. Not at all. The government represses science in Constantinople; when Islam was at its highest degree of exaltation, it called science to Bagdad and Cordova. Some holy personages of the Christian Church once made almost the same argument against the sciences as Omar, but this did not prevent us from being what we are. And since it is a question of science, I will observe that in Europe we are too accustomed to believe that men are created only to make books. Voltaire held this ridiculous

[60] [Jean-Baptiste Sénac, *Traité de la structure du coeur, de son action et de ses maladies* (Paris 1749).]

[61] This is the remark of anonymous writer in the *European Magazine*, 179?, no. ? (This name escapes me.)

idea to a supreme degree; he believed that a nation that did not have a theatre and an observatory was not worthy of breathing. A smattering of human sciences turned his head to the point that in an ode that he composed on the occasion of the return of some academics who had been to the pole to measure a degree of the meridian, he addressed this laughable apostrophe to the angels:

> Speak! Were you not jealous of the great Newton?[62]

Pope was far wiser, more profound, and more spiritual when he said, speaking also to the angels:

> Newton was for them what an ape is for us.[63]

In the presence of the One who made the nations, there are no sciences; when he thinks of what he does not know, the sage is not even permitted to be proud of what he knows. In reflecting, on the drawbacks of the sciences, moreover, without going as far as Rousseau, one could say of them what Tacitus said of precious metals in speaking of a simple people that did not know them: "It is a question to know if the divinity refused them out of goodness or in anger."[64]

The sciences are good if they make us better and happier. Be that as it may, we know as much as we can know on this rusty planet; and since this is our lot, let us make the best of it. But let us not always be so disposed to prefer ourselves to others. Each people fulfils its mission; we despise the Orientals, and they despise us. Who is to judge between us? See these pashas, these disgraced viziers! The sea offers them an assured flight; immense portable wealth promises them ease anywhere; they know of our hospitality, and the keen curiosity we have to welcome rapturously everything unusual. We offer them our arts, our liberty, and our good manners. They want neither our arts, nor our liberty, nor our good manners. They remain home; they await the cord,

[62] [*Epitre LI, A Madame la Marquise du Chatelet, Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Garnier 1778): 10:304]

[63] *Essay on Man*, Epistle V. [In fact, Epistle II, 34. In the text, I have given a literal translation of Maistre's French (which he may have been citing from an earlier translator): "*Newton étoit pour eux ce qu'un singe est pour nous.*" Pope's verses run as follows:

> Superior beings, when of late they saw
> A mortal Man unfold all Nature's law,
> Admir'd such wisdom in an early shape,
> And shew'd a NEWTON as we shew an Ape.]

[64] "The gods have denied them gold and silver, whether in mercy or in wrath I find it hard to say." (Tacitus *Germany* 5) [Loeb.]

and their descendants say proudly: "In our country one does not die in bed."[65]

It would be the height of folly to maintain that the character of peoples is their own work; but when we say that they have made their government, this is the same folly in other terms.

Let us consult history: we will see that each nation fumbles and feels its way, as it were, until a certain combination of circumstances places it in precisely the situation that suits it. Then it suddenly deploys all its faculties at the same time; it shines in all kinds of things, it is all that it can be, and never has a nation been seen to return to this state, after it has fallen.[66]

[65] A Turkish said this to Lady Wortley Montagu. She had the tone of a French woman who could count among her ancestors five or six marshals of France killed on the field of battle. (See the letters of this spiritual lady.) [Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) was the wife of the English ambassador to Constantinople. Her amusing *Turkish Letters* (1763) are credited with encouraging smallpox inoculation in England.]

[66] Bolingbroke said that nations could regenerate themselves; it would have been fine if he could have proved it. Here is what seems to me to be more true: it is that nations, in moving through their period of deterioration, can have, from time to time, certain bursts of strength and greatness that are themselves in a declining progression, as in ordinary times. Thus, the Roman Empire, in its decline, was great under Trajan, but less so however than under Augustus; it shone under Theodosius, but less than under Constantine; finally, it had fine moments even under the pedant Julian and under Heraclius, but the declining progression went its way and did not change the law. The highest point for a nation is the one where its intellectual strength reaches its *maximum* at the same time as its physical strength; and this point, determined by the state of the language, never takes place at the same time for each nation. It is true that the state of which I am speaking is not an indivisible point, and that it is susceptible of more and less. Thus, not to get lost in subtilties, if we represent the growth and decline of the Roman Empire by a parabola, Augustus is the summit, and his reign occupies a certain portion at the top of the curve; we descend on one side to Terence or Plautus, and on the other to Tacitus; at one point genius ends, at another barbarism begins; strength continues along these two branches, but always diminishing. It was born with Romulus.

Let us now consider the phases in the history of the French nation. It shone especially under the reigns of Clovis I, Charlemagne, Philip-Augustus, Charles the Wise, Francis I, Henry IV, Louis XIII, and Louis XIV. Up to the last period, it did not cease to rise, and all that it suffered under unfortunate reigns must be put in the rank of sorrowful shocks that do not regenerate nations (for no one can prove that they can be regenerated), but that perfect them when they are in their period of growth, and that push them towards the highest point of their greatness.

Today there are big questions to ask about France. For example, this highest point, of which we spoke, can it be determined by contemporaries or by their

For France, this shining point was the century of Louis XIV. No sovereign in the world was more a king than this prince. Obedience, under his reign, was a veritable cult, and never were the French more submissive and greater. Then we saw the type of the French character par excellence, in every kind of perfection of which it is susceptible; this was a mixture of religion, chivalry, genius, kindliness, and gallantry. Finally, this was a whole so dazzling that Europe bowed down before this unique character, proclaimed it as the model of loveable character, and made it its glory to imitate it.

The general conclusion that must be drawn from these observations is that it is impossible for a nation not to be made for the government under which we have seen it deploy all its moral faculties at one time. Now as all nations have come to this high point of greatness under different governments, it follows that all governments are good, and by a consequence no less certain, that there is no social contract, no convention, no deliberation on the acceptance of sovereignty in general nor of a particular sovereignty: for it is not man who has made himself sociable, and no man in particular has made himself suitable for such or such government. Nations, like individuals, therefore, are only, according to the expression of Thales, *instruments of God*, who forms them and who uses them, according to hidden designs, which we can at most surmise. When nations begin to know themselves and to reflect on themselves, their government has been made for centuries. No one can show its beginning, because it always precedes written laws, which are only declarations of anterior rights engraved on the universal conscience. Great legislators, legislators par excellence, prove nothing against the general thesis, and even confirm it. First, by their small number they are phenomena, miracles, that attest more particularly and rend palpable, literally, an action superior to human action. In the

immediate posterity? Can another century present the same phenomenon as the seventeenth: that is to say all talents united to the highest degree, in France, by the French, at the same time? Can the language of this nation be perfected? Are there, perhaps, proofs that a nation has begun its period of deterioration? The arguments that could be made to establish the affirmative, could they have have been made in the time of the Jacquerie and the League? All the nations that we have seen pass away having died in the same way, that is to say by new nations coming to substitute themselves on the very soil of the latter by way of conquest, if this does not happen, and if the most corrupt nation that one can imagine remains quietly within its boundaries, can if form itself on the same soil into a new nation, truly *other*, although speaking the same language? ... The examination of these questions, on which history appears mute, would carry me too far and would moreover exceed my abilities. So I limit myself to raising them, as the *Journal de Paris* once said.

second place, just as two things are necessary to fashion a machine, first an artisan capable of executing it, and secondly material that responds to the design of the artisan, in the same way the legislator would produce nothing if he did not have *material* under his hand, that is to say a people made to obey his action, and this people is not made such. The great man who fashions it is already a prodigy.

Sovereignty is therefore foreign to the people in two ways, since they neither deliberate on sovereignty in general nor on the particular sovereignty that rules them. In an elevated sense, the Roman people on the Janiculum are as passive as the pasha who receives the cord and kisses it. The soldier who mounts an assault certainly displays very great activity; however he only obeys his general who sends him to victory or to death; similarly the people that show the greatest energy for their liberty, deploy the qualities they have received and that render them capable of such a government. Everything, therefore, leads us back to the author of all things. Power comes from him, obedience comes from him, everything comes from him, except evil...

This work goes no farther; moreover, it is only an essay that has not even been reread. (Author's note.)

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